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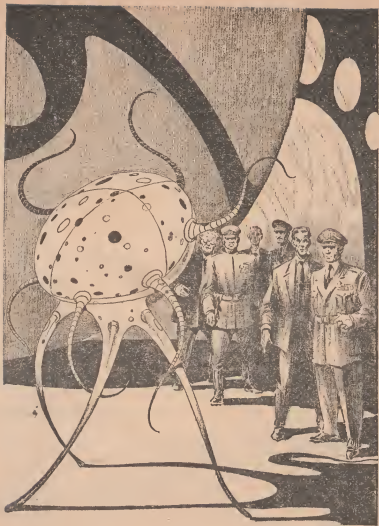
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NOVELET

THE GIFT OF THE GODS

There was a ship, and on this ship the knowledge and techniques of beings long forgotten. And how could those who sent this gift know that to some men, the secrets of the Universe were like a yellow Cadillac at a Junior Prom?

by **RAYMOND F. JONES**

illustrated by **KELLY FREAS**

A STORY is supposed to have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It's hard to say whether this one began on Mahlia XII, when the ship was pushed out into the night of space with its single robot crewman—in some long-ago time which no one can ever know—or whether it began that night of the Junior Dance at Western Technical and Engineering College back in 1936. Or maybe it had no beginning at all.

Just as it has no ending.

But if it loses some literary value for not being broken up into these artificial divisions, perhaps it also gains by coming closer to the ordinary affairs of all of us, which likewise have no beginnings or endings—except those of birth and death. In any event, wherever the story is picked up—it began long ago, and this is the middle.

The ship fell into the sea, off the New Jersey coast. It flamed like

a hot cinder as it neared the Earth, and at least ten million people were estimated to have seen it. The newspapers played it for all it was worth with screaming headlines: *Flying Saucer Crashes in Ocean*.

As nearly everyone remembers, the ship was found floating on the surface the following day; it was immediately surrounded by Coast Guard vessels and boarded quite easily. And then the Government of the United States made one of those absolutely incredible moves for which it is so famous, and which leaves the average European gasping with disbelief. Although the ship was clearly in the territorial waters of the United States, it was turned over shortly to the United Nations for inspection by all the world, including the nations on *our* side and the ones on *their* side.

Actually, however, this did not form the basic conflict that mounted over the presence of the ship. Events might have occurred just about as they did whether the Russians were present or not. The conflict was basically a difference between two men who were on the same side, but whose ideas were not alike...

IT WAS A gray, rainy November morning in Chicago when Dr. Clark Jackson was notified of the call from Washington. He was in the midst of a critical phase of his research, and it made little difference to him where the call originated; he made them wait for fifteen minutes until he reached a breaking point in his instrumental analysis. When he finally learned the call was from Lieutenant General George Demars, he wished momentarily he had not come to the phone at all.

"Clark!" said George Demars. "How are you?"

"Pretty good," said Clark. "I could wish I was in Florida on a morning like this, but otherwise things are fine."

"I can't do anything about getting you to Florida," said George, "but I can get you out of Chicago, at least."

"No, I'm afraid not; I have a research program that is good for another ten months."

"You've read the papers. You know why I'm calling."

"This flying saucer thing? I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I can't help you there. That's one item I've had no experience with."

"This is on the level, Clark. I've been in the ship; it's the biggest thing that ever happened to the human race."

That was extending his boundaries pretty far, even for George, Clark thought. But then it had been five years since they had seen

each other. "I hope you'll send me a copy of your official report when you get through dissecting whatever it is you've found—provided, of course, that it's not too top-secret."

"I've got to have you, Clark. I'll come out there personally and put you aboard a plane. I can't tell you how big this thing is over the phone, but I'm not mistaken, and I'm not lying. This thing came from outer space; it's got engines that have carried it past galaxies, and we haven't the faintest idea how they run.

"It's a matter of time, too. Already the Russians are telling us how many scientists we can put aboard to inspect the ship, and how long they can look. We've got to have the best man in the country to head up the crew of analysts who will represent big-hearted Uncle, and see that he doesn't lose all his marbles in this crazy setup. You're it."

For a moment Clark Jackson let his eyes rest on the smooth black surface of the phone in front of his face. He wondered how much he should discount because of what he knew of George Demars. For at least a third of their mutual lives he had hated George with a dark, bitter hate that was all the more ravaging because it had so little to be exhibited as cause. George was perfectly aware of his feelings, yet he had called upon Clark repeatedly during the war, when that hate was sharper and more bright than it was now.

It had almost died in the long years since their last meeting, but George could not know that now. Demars ignored its possible existence and called on him to do a job he believed only Clark Jackson could perform. This alone seemed to call up again the old feeling that had burned so long in Clark's breast.

But the important thing now was whether George had hold of something that was real or would turn out to be another fantasy. The possibility that it might be real set a new kind of fire burning within Jackson. "All right. I'll come," Clark said. "Where do you want me to contact you?"

THEY HAD known each other in college. Clark Jackson came from a none too prosperous farming family and community; that was long before the war had bestowed independence upon the farmers and enabled so many of them to become big operators. Clark worked his way through college with the usual round of tedious and obscure jobs sandwiched between long, torturous hours of study.

It was much different with George Demars. He drove his own Cadillac convertible around the campus and played football, and never

did any work at all that he did not choose to perform.

The two men did not cross paths very often during their first years at Western T and E. They had freshman math and physics in the same class and calculus the following year. When they were Juniors they had vector analysis together. Apart from this there was little else but the night of the Junior dance.

In spite of their meager contacts, however, Clark was intensely aware of his occasional classmate. It seemed that whatever street he walked upon, he had only to look up and he would see that yellow Cadillac streaming along the highway, top down and loaded with an incredible number of good-looking girls and well-dressed college men like George Demars himself.

It seemed to Clark in those hard years that George was everything he was not. George was on the football team; he could wear a tuxedo in a way that made him look like a rising young member of the Diplomatic Corps. At any casual gathering he was the one to sit at the piano and entertain with anything from Bach to boogie woogie.

Of course, Clark didn't actually see many of these performances, but what he didn't see, he heard about. No one on the campus was not in some degree aware of George Demars; he was the college man's college man.

There was no questioning George's basic intellectual abilities, either. In classes they shared he matched Clark grade for grade. He was majoring in electronics engineering, while Clark had planned all his life for a career in theoretical physics.

Even if George had never inflicted any overt cruelty, Clark still would have hated him. Perhaps this is understandable only to those who have been forced to walk parallel to a creature like George during all the raw years of late adolescence, when the need to function bravely is so great, and the ability so remote.

In later years Clark could admit a great deal of it as hate for his own inadequacy. If he had never been forced by circumstances to associate with George he could have admitted all of it; but when General Demars was near, Clark's old feelings swarmed up with an intensity too great to turn inward, for the years had not materially changed their relationship. In his own field Dr. Clark Jackson was supreme—but George Demars was supreme wherever he went.

Clark made an appearance at very few social functions during his college years. There were one or two informal dances during his sophomore year, and the President's annual reception, which he felt

THE GIFT OF THE GODS



he should attend for political reasons—although he recognized at graduation that the President and most of the faculty remained completely unaware of him.

The major exception to his normal custom occurred in his junior year when he attended the large and formal Junior dance. He went because, for some miraculous reason, his invitation to the dance was accepted by Ellen Pond, an incredibly beautiful sociology major whom he had worshipped from afar since the first day of his freshman year.

IT TOOK two years for him to reach the point of exchanging a casual hello with her on the campus. Her agreement to go with him to the dance was all but paralyzing. He rented his first tuxedo for the occasion and at once became wholly aware of another vast difference between him and George Demars.

He was convinced he looked like a scarecrow that had been dressed in formal attire, incapable of disguising the fact he was a scarecrow. For a time he went through an agony of indecision as to whether he should try to break off the date with Ellen, but his desire to be with her was so great that he carried it through.

He was relieved when Ellen greeted him at the door pleasantly and without the slightest indication she thought him ridiculous. But then he remembered Ellen was certainly too gracious to be anything but kind, no matter what she thought or felt.

She didn't seem to mind going in a taxi, either, and during the evening she was so gay and wonderful that Clark felt a vague dread as if things were going entirely too well, and couldn't possibly continue. The feeling crystallized the moment he saw George Demars at the center of a laughing group doing homage to his suave humor.

It was not until near the end of the evening, however, that George became aware that Clark and Ellen were there. Then—almost accidentally it seemed—he came up to them and introduced his date, a girl who was very beautiful in her own right but who seemed to Clark quite plain by comparison with Ellen. Reluctantly, Clark introduced George and Ellen.

"But Ellen and I are old friends," said George; "I hope we may have at least one dance together."

He looked with amused inquiry from one to the other, taking for granted that he would not be refused. Clark nodded almost imperceptibly, wishing for the courage to tell him to go to hell, but that would only create an unpleasantness he could not explain to Ellen.

He knew George was lying, because Ellen had told him earlier she would like to meet him. So Clark watched them whirl away from him across the floor. He put his arm about George's companion without even looking at her; he remembered her name was Marcia.

Later, when it became apparent that George and Ellen had left the dance with no intention of returning, he took Marcia home in a taxi, and she thanked him very kindly for seeing her home. For a moment she waited by the door and Clark sensed she was going to offer some gesture of sympathy—she would say that, after all, he shouldn't feel bad losing out to George. That could happen to *anybody*. He fled down the steps in sickness and panic.

During the entire night he rolled sleeplessly in his bed, building up a reserve of icy fury that sustained him until he met George in the hall after their vector analysis class next day. He drew George into a doorway of an empty classroom and tried to assume an image of bleakest defiance. "That was a dirty, cowardly trick last night, Demars," he said. "I'm warning you to never pull anything like that again, and keep out of Miss Pond's way from here on out."

He turned and strode away before George Demars could recover from astonishment.

Later in the day, when Ellen came up to him and apologized, she said, "I didn't mean to, Clark. Honestly, I didn't mean to run out on you. I told George I'd always wanted to see his car and he said we'd just ride around the block. I couldn't resist, but he kept going, and when we got back to the dance it was too late. Won't you forgive me enough to let me make up for it sometime real soon?"

All he could answer was, "I'm sure there is nothing to apologize for, Miss Pond; nothing at all." He walked stiffly away from her.

He never had the courage to ask her again, and the following year she didn't come back to school. He never did know what happened to her, but for a long time he consumed himself with a furious despair that he might have married Ellen Pond if it hadn't been for George.

ABOARD the plane flying eastward in the night, he watched the lights of the cities below and thought of these things that were so far away and long ago. He could smile a little now, but there was still a faint, exquisite pain in thinking of them. He had never married anyone. Past thirty, he considered it was far too late for him; but sometimes—as now, when there was nothing to do, and nothing to see

but darkness and far pinpoints of light—he wondered if there had ever been a possibility of Ellen's marrying him.

He glanced impatiently at his watch. It was still a half hour before landing at the Newark airport. George was flying up from Washington a little earlier and had promised to have a car waiting to take Clark to the site where the so-called spaceship was under guarded examination. A spaceship, he thought. How improbable!

And yet it had to be. It was only fitting that the irony of the relationship between him and George Demars should be maintained in this way. He had lain awake hundreds of nights during his career of nuclear research, dreaming of the accomplishments he and his fellows would make possible: the first spaceship—man's reaching out to the stars.

But George had to be the one to contact it first and present it to *him*. That's the way things had always been between him and George Demars.

George had turned out to be a good engineer, one of the nation's best; and Clark had developed equally as a top flight research physicist. Both of them had risen high and fast during the war, but it had been George who became concerned with administration and policies and negotiations that led to the utilization of basic research. As if wholly unaware that there had ever been any turbulent feelings between them, George reached out to Clark and called upon his talent for the solution to scores of seemingly impregnable questions.

They had worked well, never speaking of the past, as if by some mutual pact they would each do his part to keep erect a well-defined barrier between them. Parting at the end of the war, Clark had assumed it would be for the final time. He expected to retreat to the depths of pure mathematical-physical research, and leave George Demars to his brilliant and publicly lauded engineering triumphs.

Vaguely, he felt that was the way it should have been; he shouldn't have come, he thought. It was wrong for him to try to work with George again, without the pressure that had forced them together before. He shouldn't have come—but he couldn't have done otherwise; he had to know about this ship that George said had come from out of space.

THE PLANE landed in the rain. He ran for the gate in the fence separating the field from the administration building. Two men

stepped out of the shelter and one touched him on the arm. "Dr. Jackson?" he said.

Clark looked at the army coats. "Yes."

"General Demars sent us," the man said.

Clark nodded and moved along with them to the parking area beside the building. "Is George—General Demars—at the location now?"

"Yes. We will be with him shortly. This way, please, sir."

Neither of them were very talkative. Clark sat in front with the one who had spoken to him first and gave up attempts to draw them out. He stared ahead between the fan-like strokes of the windshield wiper, trying to memorize the dark landscape through which they drove.

After an hour and a half of cautious driving on the wet highway, they turned on a gravelled road leading toward the sea. A mile from the turning they were stopped by an armed guard standing before a gate in a high mesh fence. Recognized and passed through, they drove toward a vast, looming bulk that began to take shape under the dim tips of their headlight beams.

"Dirigible hangar," said the driver in answer to Clark's unspoken question. "We borrowed it from the Navy—that is, the United Nations did." He didn't try to hide the bitterness in his voice.

At one corner of the hangar a long row of lighted windows indicated the office and work rooms that had evidently been set up for the project. The guides led Clark from the car and ushered him into the smoky, too-warm atmosphere of the room.

There were about a dozen men present, but all of their faces were a blur in Clark's first hasty impression. All except one. George turned from his desk and got up to cross the intervening space with outstretched hand. His face was smiling as if theirs was a friendship that had solidified and become unshakable over the years. He was a little heavier than when they last parted, and a touch of gray was beginning to show.

"It's good to see you again, Clark," he said with sincerity in his voice. "You'll never know how much we appreciate your coming out on such short notice."

Clark took his hand. "And I'll never know why I did it. I hope it's going to be worth it. How about a look at this whatever-it-is?"

"Right away. You can get as much of an over-all look as you want

now; later there'll be the detailed study. I'll get an escort group together."

He moved away, and Clark looked about to get a fuller impression of the other men in the room. With something close to a shock he observed that most of them were foreigners of one nationality or another. Some were in uniform and some in civilian clothes. He recognized with pleasure that three were not strangers to him. There was Dr. Oglethorpe, the British physicist; Professor Rousseau of Paris; and the German, Dr. Schwartz.

He advanced toward them, but George returned suddenly and put his arm about Clark's shoulder, addressing the group as a whole. "Gentlemen, this is Dr. Clark Jackson, who is going to head the American sub-committee of our group. As you can understand, he is most anxious to see the ship. If you don't mind, we will forego formal introductions until we have more leisure and Dr. Jackson's curiosity is satisfied."

Four other men, however, appeared behind George and he introduced them briefly by name. They were all strangers to Clark, and they all turned to leave the room together.

"We never have to worry about being alone when we're in the vicinity of the ship," said George, trying to walk a little apart from the others with Clark. "Whenever we go aboard we travel in pairs, a military man and a scientist. And there are always a pair of *ours*, and one of *theirs*, and a so-called neutral; this is what we call the minimum group. No less than six of us go aboard at any one time—three scientists to peer over one another's shoulders and see that no one discovers anything the others do not, and three military men—armed and trigger-happy—to prevent shennanigans of any kind."

George spoke bitterly, but to Clark the situation was so ridiculous that he almost laughed aloud. "I can't imagine how they could have arranged it any cozier!"

"I knew you wouldn't come if I mentioned anything like this over the phone, but *now* maybe you'll stay."

They stepped through the door into the main hangar. George pointed to the object in the center, bathed in floodlights planted in a fenced off circle. The ship was not a saucer at all; it was spherical, all gray in color, and about sixty feet in diameter.

Clark stopped to take in a full view of the vessel. Illumined brightly on the bottom, its upper surface was still dark and shadowy. It

breathed of mystery and of the unknown, and Clark thought of it speeding lonely and swift between the star-systems of space.

But on the other hand it looked very much as if it might have been manufactured right here in the hangar. Clark turned to George. "This isn't some complicated hoax?" he said almost pleadingly. "It really *did* come from the stars—"

George smiled a bit grimly, then glanced to the open port of the ship. It was shadowed by a figure which had appeared suddenly. "There's your answer to that question," he said.

II

CLARK STARED. His mouth opened a trifle; his eyes widened in sudden incredulity. "That thing—" he murmured.

The shadow moved out of the doorway and came toward them. It was not quite as tall as a man, and now Clark saw there were three stiff-appearing legs walking with a grace he would have thought impossible. Atop the tripod of legs was an oblate spheroid about two feet in diameter; and around the circumference of this, on a horizontal plane, were six flexible whips that moved continually as the thing walked.

Clark had a momentary vision of the Martian strollers, as H. G. Wells described them in "The War of the Worlds."

"This is Hain Egoth," said George as the figure came up. "He's the pilot of the ship, pilot and only crewman. All your communication regarding the vessel and its contents will be with him."

"But he's—"

"Yes, he's metal—a robot, manufactured by a people who no longer exist. He showed me pictures of his makers, but they were no more pleasant in appearance than he."

Clark stared at the robot with an uncomfortable feeling there was something he ought to say, embarrassed by his inability to remember this was only a mass of metal with pre-set responses. But George was treating the machine as a fellow creature, and Clark felt obliged to follow his lead.

"This is Dr. Clark Jackson, one of the leading scientists of my people," said George.

The spheroid turned slightly and Clark felt the tiny spots of light in its upper surface were focussed upon him. A musical voice spoke in perfect English: "The people of Alcardia make you welcome, Dr.

Clark Jackson; it will be a pleasure to work with you."

"Thank you," said Clark. "I have been told nothing of Alcardia, or why your ship has come. I have yet to learn all these things."

"Our visit is preliminary," said George, "mostly for the purpose of demonstrating to Dr. Jackson that you are truly a visitor from another star system. It will not be necessary for you to give him the basic information; I will pass that on after we go."

"But I would much rather do it," said Hain Egoth; "permit me, if you do not mind."

The two pairs of Russian and Swedish observers followed close behind as Clark and George followed the robot up the short incline leading to the port. The opening was half a head too low for the Earthmen, and they ducked to enter it. Clark paused a moment to pass a finger over the smooth cold metal. The skin of the ship was more than two feet in thickness; he supposed it was made up of multiple layers with vacuum space between. The metal was unpainted and uncorroded, its dull sheen indicating possibly a complex steel alloy or perhaps a combination of metals that had not even been explored by Earthmen.

Clark felt as if some portion of his awareness had been stunned by the impact of the vessel's reality. He wanted to slow down and take time to contemplate, but the robot urged them on. "This way, if you please," said Hain Egoth.

It was difficult to believe they were not following a living guide. George had obviously ceased to rebel against the thought of the robot as a sentient, living thing. Clark supposed it was easier than trying to devise an etiquette appropriate to robots in contrast to that of human beings.

Hain Egoth moved through a narrow corridor to a central chamber about twenty feet in diameter. It was filled with panels and banks and tubing sprinkled with unfamiliar symbols. The power room, Clark guessed.

The robot confirmed this. "The primary power is atomic," he said; "it is somewhat more advanced than your own developments. The energy transfer processes are something entirely new to you, however, being based wholly upon field phenomena. You will learn the details of this at a later time."

As Clark's eyes scanned the chamber, all his cynical expectancy of disappointment fled. He experienced for himself the overwhelming truth that the ship was from the stars, the product of a culture perhaps

many thousands of years ahead of Earth. But why had it come? What had happened to that distant culture?

HE TURNED to glance at those behind him, and recoiled with shock at the sight of their faces. The scientists were gazing about with an expression that had only one name: greed. Almost literally, Jackson thought, they were licking their lips in delicious anticipation of assimilating that which they beheld. He wondered if his own face betrayed such avarice.

But it was the faces of the military men that made him catch his breath in sudden fear. Even the Swedish Colonel—but more particularly the Russian—were standing beside their scientific partners with faces indrawn, remote, grim, bespeaking only one emotion—possession.

As if they had spoken aloud, Clark understood the thoughts of each: that he was determined to possess for himself alone the things upon which they all gazed at this moment. Then he looked at George and felt almost physically sick. The face of his associate matched or even exceeded the others' in expressing grim, blind determination to possess.

Clark forced himself to speak to Hain Egoth. "This is evidence of a wonderful science far beyond our own; I hope we shall have an adequate chance to learn it for ourselves."

He was close to the robot. For a moment Hain Egoth made no answer, but Clark had the feeling that those mechanical eyes were scanning his face as if in a quick, desperate search for something the robot had to find.

"You shall have the opportunity," he said in a voice almost low enough to keep the others from hearing.

In the center of the chamber a steep, almost vertical escalator led to the upper levels. Hain Egoth mounted it and the others followed him to the next level. Here a large chamber was occupied by faceless cabinets and compartments, which offered no clue to their contents. The robot stepped in front of them and gestured dramatically, while his eyes rested particularly on Clark. Or so it seemed—as nearly as Clark was able to tell.

"This is why I have come," Hain Egoth said. "In this chamber, and in the ones above us, are the products of a half million years of civilization; I bring it as the gift of my people."

"Why?" exclaimed Clark. "Why were you sent out with such a gift?"

"My people are no longer able to act as custodians of that which they have created and discovered; my people no longer exist."

The robot's words seemed like the far away sound of a deep toned bell.

"How did they fail?" said Clark quietly.

"They were not able to establish a sufficiently stable relationship between themselves, in spite of their great conquests of the physical universe. I will say more of this later."

He turned to a panel on one of the nearby cabinets and pressed a small square. The cabinet front slid up, revealing a dark hollow space; but almost at once it was replaced by a globe hanging in the midst of the darkness, like a planet seen from a few thousand miles away in space.

"My world," said Hain Egoth. "Different from yours, the atmosphere such that you could not have survived there, considerably warmer for being near its sun.

"But my people have travelled the same path you are now on. They had the thoughts and hopes you now have. By their gifts they desired to shift the probability of your traveling to the very end of that path which they followed."

He pressed another control and the sphere swelled until it filled the darkness completely and they were able to see only a portion of its surface. It was a dark, savage place with heaving seas. Thick, strangling clouds washed over a landscape that erupted with volcanic fires at some points, and at others was laid over by giant forests where vicious life forms rampaged.

"This was the beginning," said the robot, "before my people came. I have been told that it was much the same with Earth."

Clark nodded silently, standing in awe before the perfection of this reproduction.

"And this is when we were greatest," said Hain Egoth.

He shifted the scene again. The primeval world gave way to a scene that was like a giant garden. There appeared to be no large cities on the land, but clusters of village size communities were everywhere.

"Control of climate made it possible to utilize the entire land surface of the planet."

"You are prepared to show us this, of course," said the Russian Colonel in an almost accusing tone, as if he suspected the robot of holding out on them.

"I will show it to you. And now—the end."

HE FLASHED another scene before them and it was almost as if the first had returned. The multitudes of villages were gone, but here and there could be seen faint ruins. The dark jungle had spread over the land, broken only by sheets of yellow desert.

Clark felt a sense of horror, and the robot seemed to detect his reaction. "Yes," he said, "my people destroyed themselves. A few of the survivors who sent me out made a final desperate effort to retain control of the world on which their fathers had lived, but they did not expect to succeed.

"I and the cargo which they sent out with me was their real hope of keeping their civilization from completely perishing."

"Why didn't they come with you?" asked Clark. "Surely they could have sent out other ships, too, and colonized elsewhere."

"Perhaps," said the robot. "There were many who advocated just such a plan, but they did not carry it out. It was important for them that they survive among their own kind, on their own world. Personal survival was not important to them if it could not be achieved in this manner.

"As for coming with me, they prepared me to do what they might not be able to. They knew I might have to take a journey longer than many times their lifespan, and this has been true. It has been done as they desired. Criticism by your standards is of no avail, for they are gone; but perhaps, when you understand all their acts and history, you will not wish to criticize."

"We can see it all—right here in this viewer?" said Clark.

"Yes. Every day of my people's history is recorded. I hope you will find it of worth to look intimately upon the lives of my people and learn all that they have done."

He shut down the viewer and closed it up. "That is enough for tonight," he said; "I sometimes forget that you are subject to fatigue. I believe Dr. Jackson's arrival completes the necessary organization so that we may proceed with formal instructions, does it not, General Demars?"

George nodded. "One more day should complete our arrangements, and then we shall begin."

CLARK FELT a somewhat ridiculous impulse to shake hands with Hain Eguth as they turned away from him at the entrance to the

ship and walked back through the gloomy cavern of the hangar. He and George dropped their companions at the office and went out together to a car.

"I've arranged quarters for you at my hotel," said George; "I'll drive you. I know you want to get some sleep, but there are a few things I want to say. You've got to get the full picture of this situation as quickly as possible."

It had stopped raining, and the moon made a silvery glistening on the highway as they drove away from the base.

"There's no use railing against the stupidity of those responsible for turning this thing over to the U. N.," said George. "You get the picture of what we're up against as a result of that blunder. The contents of the ship spell military security for a good long time for any nation that gets its hands on it first—and to the exclusion of all others."

"It doesn't look as if anyone is going to get into such a position under the present circumstances."

"That look is entirely deceptive. Every one of us taking part in the ship's investigation is charged with getting the data, getting it first, and using every possible means of keeping the opposition party from also getting hold of it. *They're* doing it and *we're* doing it by any hook or crook. They will try to seize or destroy important key data to keep them from falling into our hands after they have absorbed them first."

"We do the same?"

"Exactly," said George; "there is no alternative."

"Not one?" said Clark slowly. "Isn't there a third alternative in which all the nations possess the same knowledge, and use it for non-military purposes?"

George laughed softly in mock despair. "I keep forgetting," he said, "that it is hard for the average citizen who isn't up against it every day of his life to recognize the realities of the world in which we live. To those of us who know the real situation, the answer is absolutely no; your third alternative does not exist in the world in which you now live. The prime utilization of the Alcardian data for a long time to come will be to determine who of us will represent the human race in the future which we hope will come.

"But the thing I must emphasize is that the commission I am offering you is a double one. It is not enough to analyze the information Hain Egoth gives out; you must also make very sure our partners do

not steal essential information from under our noses. In return you must do your best to keep *them* from obtaining as many vital elements as possible in order to cripple their attempts to build armor out of the Alcardian principles.

"I recognize this is not the way you would like it; it isn't the way you think it should be done. But you've got to take the word of all of us who know the true situation, that this is absolutely the way it must be done!"

"Suppose I don't agree?" said Clark after a long silence.

"You will. Deep inside, you're not the fuzzyhead that many of the bomb scientists turned out to be. Much as you hate to do so, you will yield idealism to common sense. You did when we worked together before; you won a good many important battles for us even while you were hating the whole war. You'll do it again!"

III

GEORGE came up to the room he had reserved for Clark and sat on the bed. He talked of their work during the war but seemed careful to go back no farther toward the barrier they tacitly recognized. He appeared reluctant to leave, as if anxious to make certain there was nothing amiss in their present relationship, that Clark harbored no unsuspected reservations or had acquired no new evaluations which would make him less cooperative than he had once been.

It was almost dawn when he finally did leave. Clark felt a kind of satisfaction in noting there was still an appearance of uncertainty about George, as if he doubted the quality of loyalty he could command of the physicist.

"Two this afternoon, don't forget," said George. "I hope you feel like making it. Just this one final conference and we ought to be able to get things moving."

"I'll be ready," Clark promised.

When he was alone Clark no longer felt like going to bed. The pink light of dawn in the sky began to remove his sleepiness and fatigue. He sat in the big chair by the window to watch the sun come up out of the sea across the city.

He wished there were some way of knowing what George was thinking while he spoke. He wished he could have known when they were at Western T and E so long ago. He suspected then that George's

attitude was one of supreme contempt for all lesser endowed human beings. It seemed to find literal expression in his flashy Cadillac and his easy accomplishments in a score of fields, each one of which taxed the average undergraduate to the limit.

During the war, Clark Jackson had begun to have a more charitable view of George, accepting him as an extremely vital human being who perhaps seldom even bothered to compare his own functions with those of anyone else.

Now Clark was not so sure.

Yield idealism to common sense—it sounded as if George had said: "Clark Jackson will yield to George Demars".

And, "You'll do it again." Precisely what would he do again—yield his own ideals once more to the urgency of the times? Yield his own "Clark Jackson will yield to George Demars."

His reactions were perhaps childish, he thought, but he couldn't help it. There rose again the faint ghost of the agony that had haunted him during college years, eating at the precarious confidence he had acquired in his abilities to conduct the business of simple existence. He could not escape the fact that the mere presence of George Demars was still sufficient to make him doubt himself. They both had to live in a world of war, and dollars, and Ellen Ponds—but only George seemed to have been equipped for survival there.

Yet the day was not far off when it might be predominantly a world of atoms, and stars, and matrix mathematics. Perhaps their endowments to cope with these were not so unequal. And perhaps the major question at this moment was which kind of a world the ship of Hain Egoth belonged to.

"Yield idealism to common sense—you'll do it again—"

He was not being childish; there was only one interpretation possible. George had called him because he believed there was no question that he would knuckle under to the plea of military necessity as he had done before, abandoning such ideals as might be affected by the impact of the gifts of the Alcardians.

He stood up as the first blaze of morning sunlight flamed through the window. Whatever he did, he was not going to knuckle under again. He didn't know fully at the moment what he thought or felt about the robot and the ship—but he knew what he had seen in his fellow men at the hangar, and it was not a pleasant thing. Their mutual distrust and savage suspicions hovered over the group like a visible pall.

Something had to be done about that. If Hain Egoth's gifts were as great as implied, they had to be rescued from this shroud of military greed. It would be his task, he thought, to work for a free and equitable distribution of these secrets among all men.

And there was nothing at all that General Demars could do about that determination.

HE FINALLY had breakfast in the diningroom of the hotel and returned to his room for a few hours' sleep. At noon he woke up feeling not entirely rested but unable to sleep longer.

He called the Base and found George was not there yet. He decided to go right out. George probably wouldn't like it, but he wanted to be on the grounds for a while without the General constantly by his side. He felt a pleasurable anticipation of meeting the other scientists on the project, renewing acquaintances and making new ones among the very reputable men George had told him were participating.

He called a car rental agency to get an automobile for his own use. George probably wouldn't like that, either, but it was going to go on the expense account, because he had no intention of being dependent on the Army chauffeurs during his entire stay.

The drive to the base occupied a much shorter time than it had during the previous rainy evening. The sky was clear and a stiff, cold breeze, following the passage of the cold front during the night, was blowing out to sea. A mile from the Base, Clark caught sight of the U. N. flag atop the hangar. Somehow he felt cheered by the sight; if the ideals of the organization were ever realized, that would be the flag men would someday plant on the surface of the Moon.

And after he was admitted at the gate to the Base he looked back and smiled to himself. When he and his fellow scientists had done their work on this project all the fences could be torn down.

The office appeared almost deserted. An American Colonel looked up as Clark entered. He frowned a moment, then came forward.

"Dr. Jackson, isn't it?" he said. "I'm Colonel Allison. I talked to you on the phone a moment ago. General Demars hasn't reported yet, but I'm sure he'll be here soon if you'll just make yourself comfortable. You'll have to excuse a certain roughness in our arrangements in the matter of timing and facilities. It has been very difficult here at first."

He glanced to the room beyond, and Clark saw that here were most of the personnel whose absence he had been wondering about. The

room was a study and conference room fitted out with long library tables and chairs, and bookshelves partly filled. His glance showed him men of a half dozen nationalities.

"Things are going to be better," said Clark. "You've tried to organize on a military-political basis. I think you will find the scientists of the group capable of crossing international barriers with greater facility than other members."

"I have no doubt of that," said Colonel Allison pleasantly, "but there is such a thing as too much facility in these matters. A certain optimum is required, and this is sometimes very difficult to define."

Clark looked sharply at the soldier, but Allison's face remained pleasant, as if offering a casual observation in no wise meant for a reprimand, or piece of advice.

"I think the optimum will be found," said Clark, "to consist of maximum freedom of communication between all parties on all subjects."

The Colonel smiled but offered no rebuttal. "Perhaps you would care to visit in the other room until the General arrives. We have the beginnings of an extensive library, although it is small so far."

IN THE STUDY and conference room, Clark tried to get a feeling of the atmosphere and hated what he was able to detect. There was a tightened, secretive desire that seemed to rest within the very material of the building itself, and infused the air with a sense of withdrawal.

At a table near the door Clark saw the English physicist, Oglethorpe, engaged in an animated discussion with other members of his group. The moment he caught sight of Clark his face lighted with pleasure and he arose with extended hand.

"Dr. Jackson! How delighted I am to see you. I was hoping we'd get time to converse last evening, but I understood, of course, how fatigued you were after your journey—and how anxious to see the ship."

And then, while Clark stood there shaking the Englishman's hand, he became aware of a strange phenomenon that sent a chill through his backbone, as if some cold wind had passed through the room. The light in Oglethorpe's face dimmed. His handshake grew mushy, and he glanced nervously over his shoulder. It was like watching a man die, Clark thought.

He followed the Englishman's glance. It went to the table where his five companions were watching, three military men and two civilian

scientists. Their eyes were cold and motionless upon Oglethorpe and his American friend—estimating, waiting, calculating, suspecting, and disapproving.

"It's been a long time, hasn't it?" said Oglethorpe, the enthusiasm gone from his voice. "Nineteen forty-three, at Monmouth—"

Clark nodded. "I followed a number of your papers afterwards. The recent one on radiation reflection is excellent."

"Yes—thanks, I'm glad you liked it." Oglethorpe stirred uneasily. "Well, I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me now. There was a little matter I was discussing with my party, and they're particularly anxious to get it settled before the meeting. Let me introduce you to my associates, at least."

One by one he shook hands with the rest of Oglethorpe's group. Their cold handshakes were at once a greeting and a farewell. When they were through, there was nothing but for him to turn away and leave.

He glanced at the other groups huddled about their tables. The Swedes were together, as were the Italians, the French, the Russians. Nowhere did anyone cross a barrier to a group not his own; no one extended him an invitation to join them; none came forward to greet him.

He sat down alone at an empty table and stared about him. What had happened to them? he thought. It was the fear of their military guardianship that was making them act like zombies. He would have to get Oglethorpe's address before he left today, and see his colleague privately, so they could act like human beings again.

HIS DARK thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of General Demars. George looked into the room and annoyance crossed his face as he saw Clark, but he produced a cordial smile as he came toward the scientist. "You're an early bird," he said. "I thought you would be knocking off until midafternoon."

"You require less sleep as you approach old age," said Clark.

"Then I suppose we should be getting our ten hours while we can," said George. He glanced at his watch. "It's almost time for our meeting. I was particularly anxious for you to sit in on this one, in order to get a complete over-all picture of our situation, and also get a briefing on the rules of conduct we are finding it necessary to adopt. However, I want you to meet the other members of our own sub-committee right now; they are out in the office."

Clark followed George and was introduced to Dr. Alvin Barker, a chemist, and Dr. John Paris, a mathematician. Both men he knew by reputation. He was also introduced to their military counterparts, Commander Benson of the Navy, and Lieutenant General Stagg of the Air Force. As he shook hands, he felt the military men were viewing him with the same suspicion evidenced by Oglethorpe's companions. Have they gotten to the point of suspecting one another? he wondered almost frantically.

George Demars was urging them now to the conference tables. "It's time we convened," he said. "Our agenda is heavily loaded, and we'll have to put in some sweat time if we get it cleared to begin work tomorrow."

The Americans sat at the table where Clark had been alone a few minutes before. George took his stand at an unoccupied table near the door and drew forward a microphone belonging to the P. A. system in the room. There was a scraping of chairs as those facing the other way turned to him. "As temporary secretary of the investigating committee I call the meeting to order," he announced.

Clark wondered how they were managing the question of language. There was no evidence of a translating system in use. Only later did he learn that after much preliminary squabbling had the committee members agreed to settle for the inclusion of a scientific member in their delegation who was conversant with English, and who would act as interpreter. This, coupled with a printed agenda in the language of each group, hurdled most of the language difficulties.

"Item one," said George, "is the report on completion of sub-committees appointed by each participating nation. I have to report that the American delegation is now complete with the appointment of Dr. Clark Jackson as sub-committee chairman. According to the record, this completes all sub-committees. Is there any disagreement? Are there any delegations wishing to report they are not complete?"

He glanced over the audience while there was a quick consultation in a score of languages.

"The item is closed," he announced. "Item two presents the question of distributive pattern. It was agreed at the outset that all information contained in the spaceship would be made available and without prejudice to all represented groups or nations. Our debate closed last session with the mechanics of assuring this still an open question.

"It was agreed that at all times the minimum unit of a sub-committee would be considered one scientific member, and one military

member. It was agreed that at no time would there be granted admission to the ship a group consisting of less than one unit of a politically democratic nation, one unit of a politically non-democratic nation, and one unit of a non-biased nation, to be defined hereafter.

"There remains in this agenda item the question of maximum committee membership which can be accommodated by the physical size of the ship and its facilities. Also the question of requesting Hain Egoth to present his material here in the committee room rather than aboard the vessel. We have heard debate on—"

CLARK JACKSON forced himself to stop listening, sickened by the mumbo jumbo George was giving out. It was like children in a school yard debating over the distribution of marbles, he thought. Or perhaps more like a gang of bandits in a cave full of stolen hoard, each with a hand on his knife to make certain his partner in crime seized no more than a just share of the loot.

He heard subsequently some wild suggestions that they decommission the robot and take over the vessel completely on their own terms. For a while it almost appeared this sentiment would prevail, it being pointed out that Hain Egoth was nothing but a part of the vessel's machinery not possessing a form of life or intelligence different from that to be found on a tape record.

At this, Clark could no longer retain his seat. He asked for the floor and had a moment's bitter amusement when George frowned as if he wished Clark would remain quiet, and not risk some social blunder in his ignorance of the realities with which they were dealing. But he could not refuse to recognize Clark.

"We can at times scarcely distinguish between life and death in ourselves," said Clark. "We have little right then to pass judgment on a speaking, reasoning creature who has come into our midst with the gifts of his people. Even if it is said that Hain Egoth is no more than an accumulation of metallic parts and electrical impulses, I say he is not a dead thing.

"We look upon the stars at night and for all we know they have long since vanished away; we see only the light which comes to us from far out of the past. In the same manner, Hain Egoth carries to us the light of a people who wished us well, who exhausted their dying energies that we might utilize it better than they were able to do. The robot carries the commission of that people; he carries their life. We have no right to violate it. The life and commission of the

Alcardians exist in the person of Hain Egoth, as surely as do the stars whose light we see nightly, but of whose present reality we can never be sure."

When he sat down he saw a wave of nodding agreements from most of the civilian members. The military evidenced stony disapproval. But Clark's argument carried the debate for the time being. He therefore left blank any discussion of what weapons or alarms the robot might have at his disposal to prevent any such attack as was suggested.

When the long session was finally over he felt exhausted by his internal rebellion against the proceedings, against the ridiculous conditions the committee imposed upon itself. It was all so utterly unnecessary, he thought. They could behave like mature, civilized individuals instead of like squabbling children.

The committee members left the room with hardly a word to each other, their eyes seemingly fixed straight ahead. Oglethorpe got out quickly, not glancing in Clark's direction, but Clark determined to contact him later.

George called him aside as the others left. "I think you see the picture now," he said grimly. "Do you understand what I meant when I explained what your commission would be?"

Clark nodded slowly. "I'm afraid I do; and from what I gathered this afternoon, it might also include keeping a knife out of my ribs."

"Yes," said George, "it might include just that."

GEORGE stayed on at the Base. Clark ate alone in the hotel dining room and called Oglethorpe immediately after. The Englishman answered in a cautious voice, "Oglethorpe speaking."

"Dan, this is Clark. I wanted to talk with you more than I had a chance to this afternoon. Can't we get together this evening and catch up on what's happened since—"

"I'm sorry about this afternoon," said Oglethorpe. "I wanted very much to speak with you, but, well—it's not approved. Perhaps you would care to come over to my hotel and we could sit in the lobby for a few minutes?"

His voice was cautious to the extreme, and Clark suspected he was fearful his telephone was being tapped.

"I'll be over in fifteen minutes," said Clark.

Some of Oglethorpe's caution and reserve was gone when they met. He was seated in a deep chair in the center of the lobby, rising

as soon as he saw his friend. He took Clark's hand warmly and drew him to the brown leather sofa facing the window. He maintained a smile on his face, but his voice was serious. "They're watching me," he said. "It's no use trying to go out anywhere. I think I'll be quite thankful when this assignment is over!"

"Does it have to be like it was this afternoon?" said Clark.

"I don't know," sighed Oglethorpe. "How else could it be?"

"It could be very much different; it could be just you and I, and Fenston, and Smernoff, and the others of our own kind. We could be there alone without a gun-barrel being projected over our shoulders by our kind protectors. Why couldn't we work it out alone—those of us who understand the scientific problems involved?"

Oglethorpe's face seemed to become cold and remote again. When his eyes turned upon Clark he seemed almost hostile. "You know that such a thing would not work," he said. "The world is divided into camps of armed men, and scientists are no different from anyone else.

"Your greatest chemist speaks out for the welfare state; a physicist sells the most guarded principles across the barrier to another camp. Who of these could you trust? Could I trust you with the possible life and welfare of my nation? Could you trust me?"

He shook his head vigorously. "No, Clark, it would never work. We must give them credit for handling this matter in the only possible practical manner."

"We could *make* it work," said Clark. "You and I, and the others who want sufficiently to see it work on a basis of trust and honesty and mutual understanding."

"I have told you why there is no basis for that! You cannot trust a scientist more than any other man. A long time ago, perhaps, it was true you could. The last few years have taught us otherwise."

"Because our record of the past ten or twenty years is a failure, doesn't mean it need always be so," said Clark.

Oglethorpe shook his head. "It is hopeless."

"Then what is to become of this gift of the Alcardians—their great idealism? Are we each going to ransack the ship for all the new principles we can find, then rush madly home and work to create a stockpile of new weapons and armor out of them?"

"Yes," said Oglethorpe slowly, "that is precisely what is going to happen. It is what I will do; it is what you will do. In your heart, Clark, you know there is no other way. We could not make another

way even if we tried. We have grown up in a world where we could not even attempt what you suggest.

"My military advisors kindly warned me that I could be jailed for saying these things, but it doesn't matter." The Englishman smiled wistfully. "They warned me specifically against you; they tell me your orders are to spike the equitable distribution of data from the ship at all costs."

Clark's eyes narrowed as he looked into the face of his friend. "They're wrong. They can't know what orders I have or have not received. Don't you see, Dan? They're shooting in the dark. All of them—stabbing out blindly, inviting suspicions where no suspicions exist, making enemies of men who ought to be friends."

Oglethorpe spread his hands and dropped them to his lap. "What can we do, Clark? What can any of us do?"

IV

FOR A LONG time that night Clark lay awake in his room watching the moon drift between sheds of black and silver clouds. He thought of Oglethorpe's last question. Maybe it wasn't going to be as easy as he thought, but something had to be done to change the atmosphere surrounding the transfer of gifts which Hain Egoth had brought. If the scientists failed to achieve union now, during this exchange, then Oglethorpe would be right. It would be hopeless if the barriers were suddenly built higher and thicker and deeper. But that could not be allowed to happen. He felt confident that if he could design some practical course of action they would all get behind him. Even Oglethorpe would cooperate, he was certain, if he could show the Englishman they had not already lost the battle.

Morning seemed to come all too soon. He dressed and gulped a hurried coffee and roll, and drove too fast all the way to the Base. George Demars put a hand on his arm as he entered the hangar.

"I'm glad you're here early," said George. "Get your group together and see that everyone is posted on all items of the agreements. Here's your copy. We don't want any slipup that will start a row with the Comrades. Hain Egoth expects us promptly at eight o'clock."

Clark sat at a table in the conference room, checking over the list that seemed like such childish nonsense to him. Such agreements between intelligent people lacking much in the way of common understanding were necessary, he agreed, and were a high achievement

when designed to promote mutually constructive efforts. These, however, based upon suspicion, envy, and purposes of mutual destruction were ridiculous.

As the Americans came in one by one, he checked them out on the contents of the agreements. The soldiers had virtually memorized them already. Barker and Paris shared something of his own lack of enthusiasm, but they were diligent enough in wishing to observe the letter of them.

He had not had time to become sufficiently acquainted with his fellow members of the American sub-committee. That should have been his first effort instead of seeing Oglethorpe last night, he thought; he should have determined how his own two colleagues felt about their roles. All of them seemed friendly enough, but even so he felt in their attitude an element of the same cautious reserve, approaching the suspicious, with which the rest of the commission were infected.

As the room filled, there was a restive, anxious expectancy, a combination of the uneasiness of the first day of college, and the uncertainty of facing some unknown world about to be unveiled. It seemed curious to Clark that a sense of Hain Egoth's presence was so completely lacking. He was the central figure involved here, but all the maneuvering, the complex backing and filling, was going on with scarcely a thought of him.

ABRUPTLY there was a stirring as George appeared and signalled that it was time to go. Sixty members who composed the first day's maximum committee arose, and began filing out. This was not more than a third of the full committee, but the ship could accommodate no more at one time.

"School's in session," said John Paris with a wry grin.

Hain Egoth was waiting for them at the entrance to the ship. As the commission members appeared he turned and led the way inside. The second level had been prepared with seating facilities and semantic induction equipment. This enabled him to convey speech or visual material in a manner completely independent of their native language, so that more complex forms of interpretation were eliminated.

At the table of the American group, George sat next to Clark. Simultaneously, they attached the small metallic buttons of the semantic inductor to their skulls at Hain Egoth's direction. The robot had previously analyzed standard Earth texts in the fields of physics, chem-

istry, and mathematics in order to establish a starting point. As the first session got under way he took off on an extension of quantum mechanics and relativity.

For Clark, that first day passed like an interval in paradise, and he could see that nearly all the scientific members were similarly affected. Most of their faces reflected a state of ecstasy induced by the revelations of the robot.

Clark felt an additional elation in a growing certainty that Oglethorpe's hopelessness was not going to be justified. The sharing of this data of the Alcardians would provide a bond between the scientists that no amount of military security could break down. When this was finally recognized, the tension would ease; the commission members would find it possible to greet each other like inhabitants of the same planet once more. The answer looked so simple that Clark wondered that he had concerned himself about it at all.

Science had always provided the universal solvent for the differences of mankind. It had never failed except when communication between scientists of the world had been forcibly broken. Now communication was being restored as it had scarcely existed even in the best years of Earth's history.

They broke off for a quick lunch at noon and reassembled as soon as possible. The day seemed the shortest Clark had ever spent, he thought, as George arose finally at eight o'clock that night and reminded the robot that the Earthmen could not go on indefinitely, as it could. Apologetically Hain Egoth dismissed them, urging an early return, since it would take many months to complete the work at the rate they were able to go.

Later, at the hotel, the American sub-committee met in George Demars' room for recapitulation and evaluation of the data secured during the day. For an hour the three scientists compared notes and opinions. Although technically trained, the soldiers were quickly out of their depth in the discussion.

As they came to a pause, George said quietly, "And let us not forget that today the Comrades have obtained the same material."

It was as if someone had suddenly shaded the light and opened the window to the cold night wind. Barker and Paris sank lower in their chairs.

"Whatever they are going to do with it, we have to do first and better," said George. "What do you see in it?"

"I don't know," said John Paris slowly. "I don't know what it

means; it seems to be a step beyond the electromagnetic radiation phenomena with which we are so familiar."

"Death rays? New kinds of action at a distance?"

"Possibly. You must remember that this is only the elements of what is essentially an entirely new science; we can only guess at its full development."

"And why do our guesses have to be in that direction only?" said Clark in sudden anger. "There are a thousand other directions in which we could go."

"You are absolutely right," said George. "And we shall go in all those directions—but this is the way we have to go *first*, because tonight *they're* gathered just as we are, and that is the direction in which they are going. We have only two alternatives: follow their lead, or take the initiative and destroy the threat which they pose. Which do you prefer?"

THE MOMENT Clark stepped inside the building the next morning, he knew George had been right. All the sub-committees had met, and they *had* said the same things. The faces of the men were drawn and evasive. Instead of the exhilaration with which they'd left the ship the previous evening, they were suffused with renewed anxiety and increased suspicion. The little groups of sub-committees seemed to isolate themselves still more, if that were possible.

Clark felt as if he had awakened in the midst of nightmare. The atmosphere was unbelievable; before the investigation was over they would be at each other's throats.

As the first week passed, it became evident that the indications of the initial session were correct. John Paris worked out a demonstration that the new principles of radiation made the dreaded death ray possible, for the first time. A few hundred hours of engineering development would make of it a devastating weapon that would excel the A and H bombs in killing effectiveness, without the accompanying property destruction.

The Americans, the British, the French, the Russians—there was no nation that need be without it now; there was none whose scientists were so poor they could not extrapolate these lethal developments.

And then, on the beginning of the second week, one of the scientists was shot and killed during a session by a military delegate of another nation.

The soldier accused the scientist of trying to secrete on his person

one of the original tape books, which had not been duplicated and distributed to the commission as a whole; subsequent investigation showed the accusation to be true.

The Americans were shaken and white-faced when they met in the evening after that session. Clark felt a mental dullness, as if a decision had been made for him, but he recognized that it was one he himself had made almost from the beginning. Only now was he able to recognize that he had always known the impossibility of what they were attempting.

"This committee," he said, "is simply an engineer's mock-up of the human race. We have seen a small sample today of what will happen the world over if we continue along the path we have taken; we can't go on."

"We can't stop," said John Paris.

"Wouldn't it be better if we did?" said Clark. "Wouldn't it be better even now if we told Hain Egoth to take his ship and go? We aren't ready for what he has to offer us. He has brought us the gift of the gods, and we aren't ready to receive it."

He saw at once there was no agreement. Barker shook his head vigorously. "The robot's people apparently weren't ready or worthy either. They didn't succeed in handling it, but they had their chance; we've got to have ours.

"Our safety is in the common footing which is being established. Try as we will, I think no one is getting any more than anyone else. Today's occurrence is more fortunate than tragic, because it emphasizes to all that no one is going to get any advantage over the rest. If we continue to maintain equality, there will be no danger.

"In the past it has been inequality that made one group venture to overpower another. Now, with the science of the Alcardians, a little nation is the equal of any big one. This is the principle of the equalizer, which was first exhibited in the famous Colt revolver in the early days of our West. Peaceful settlements grew out of the early disorder, and the Colt equalizer was a major factor in making this possible.

"It will work again. The entire Earth is now the frontier, and with appropriate equalizers distributed among the nations we will find a repetition of our own Western history on a worldwide scale. Today's incident will not be the last, but for every small one of its kind the chance of a big one will be reduced."

Clark listened, trying not to believe he was hearing one of his

fellow scientists. He felt suddenly lost and cold as he recognized how far they had drifted in the direction the military would have them go.

Through the discussion the eyes of George Demars remained on Clark. "That's the way it is, Clark," he said finally. "You wouldn't actually have us tell Hain Egoth to take his material and leave, would you? Not after seeing samples of the heights to which he can take us?"

Clark looked at his hands folded on the table in front of him. His thumbs pressed hard against each other. "No, of course not," he said. "But we've got to find a better answer than we've got and we've got to find it soon."

IN THE NIGHT he thought he was dreaming, and he almost screamed aloud as a midnight shape silhouetted itself against the sky. While he lay in a moment's paralysis, half unconscious from sleep and sudden fear, it dropped into the room.

Then he recognized it, almost before the inhuman voice spoke. "It is Hain Egoth, Clark Jackson," the robot said. "I want to speak with you, but it must not be known that I am here."

Clark's momentary fright was replaced by an equal feeling of surprise that the robot had come the long way from the Base and had been able to find him, all without being observed.

"Why have you come?" said Clark. "You will surely be missed at the ship."

"No one will know. I can leap your high guard fences with ease, and neutralize the radar beams which cross the area. And if anyone should come aboard my ship I will not be missed. I am not what you suppose; there are five of me aboard."

Clark gave a start of surprise as he recognized in this admission the possibility of many more secrets the robot perhaps was not willing to reveal.

"I have come," said the robot, "because you are the only one with whom I can talk. I have analyzed them all, and you are alone, Clark Jackson; you alone have an understanding that an error has been made. Hain Egoth has betrayed his people."

"What do you mean?"

"My gifts were never meant for you. You have seen for yourself that you are unable to use what I bring. You are right in calling it the gift of the gods, but it is too strong for the men of Earth. It would bring only death, not life."

"You believe this, too!" exclaimed Clark.

"Yes. It is inevitable. But I had to find one of you who also believed."

"Why did you give us your gift, if you knew we were unable to accept?"

"The decision was not fully my own; rather, it was forced upon me. I came near Earth to examine your people and to explore. I had come a long way and found few races who even approached the required standards. At first sight, your world seemed close. I was incautious in my approach; I did not expect to be attacked."

"Attacked! How?"

"Apparently your people have been on guard against some approach from space. One of your planes fired an atomic bullet which penetrated my vessel and did a small amount of damage which, however, was extremely critical. It forced me down, partly out of control."

"The flying saucers!" said Clark. "I didn't know they had set up a guard of that magnitude; I didn't know they had planes firing atomic bullets."

HAIN EGOTH continued, "When my ship was picked up, repairs were clumsily made by your people; I later replaced some of them. I was asked not to mention the attack."

"Evidently they didn't want the rest of the U. N. to know you had been brought down through an overt attack," Jackson mused. "But what has this to do with your decision to give us your material?"

"The damage was such that my ship was functionless; I could not take it up again. It was obvious I would obtain no cooperation from your people in repairing it so that I could leave. They would insist on knowing all my ship contained."

"But it appeared possible that they might be qualified to assimilate it eventually. On the other hand, it had begun to appear that I might travel through space until all my resources were exhausted without finding a group even as well qualified as yours. So I decided to complete my mission by turning over my material to you."

"And you now believe this was an error even considering the circumstances under which the decision was made?" said Clark.

"Yes. It would be better if my ship were lost forever in the depths of space rather than be instrumental in the destruction of this people who have so much hope, but have so far to go."

"We have all wondered about one question you have not discussed. Why did your own people fail? How can any people be assured of a chance to succeed in perpetuating themselves, when yours did not?"

"Since my people could not answer that question, it is obvious that I cannot," said Hain Egoth. "But the problem that they failed to solve is one that you will encounter also, if you go far enough.

"As sentient creatures become increasingly developed, they increase in creativeness and in self determinism. As they do so, the demand for external law diminishes and they become laws unto themselves. The theoretical, ultimate society is the completely lawless one in which creative individuals conform moment by moment to their own self-determined regulations for promoting the welfare of themselves, and their fellows.

"As this ideal is approached, however, deviations of any sort become increasingly critical. A small transgression near the peak will create far more chaos than a much larger crime in a society not so highly developed. Among my people, a condition of instability was reached in which the final approaches to the peak society produced a feedback that sent the entire planet into a swift spiral of degeneration. Each attempt to halt the descent seemed to accelerate it. Our scientists did not discover the basic principles of what was taking place until it was much too late, and by then they themselves were a part of it. They never learned how the disaster could have been halted, or even if it were possible for it to be done. Some considered that the theoretical lawless society was a practical impossibility. They never learned for sure."

CLARK WAS silent for a time, pondering the words of the robot, trying to imagine a society climbing so close to god-like heights and falling all the way back to utter destruction. He wondered if those Alcardians were right in supposing the peaks could never be completely reached by sentient beings.

"What can *we* do?" he said finally. "I am in agreement that your gifts should not be shared by my people, but how can it be prevented? Any attempt to halt what has begun would merely provoke force. Could you destroy your ship rather than allowing that?"

"I can—and would, if necessary," said Hain Egoth. "But then I would have failed completely. I would prefer to attempt a continuation of my search, to go on as long as possible anyway. With a little

help it would not be difficult to put my ship in good repair. But I do need that help; that is why I have come to you."

"How can I help? What can I do for you?"

"Certain repairs are necessary, which I cannot perform. You must understand something of my nature to understand the damage that has been done.

"This form you see is not in reality the robot, Hain Egoth, but merely an extension. The brain-mechanism, as you would call it, is located permanently in the ship itself, in a chamber beneath the power room. These five robot figures of the kind you see here are operated from that central unit. In addition, the controls of the ship itself are directly connected with the brain mechanism, and are manipulated by it without intervening robot forms. It is this portion of the mechanism which is damaged."

"But cannot you repair it using one of the robot forms?"

"No; that is why I need outside help. These repairs require the disconnection and isolation for a short time of the entire brain-mechanism except for a few receptor circuits which may be left in place. I can use an idle robot form to guide you in making the repairs, but I cannot perform the reflexive actions necessary to achieve the actual repairs myself. You might liken it to the case in which you would require an operation upon your own brain. Temporary disconnection would be required, and the work could not be carried out reflexively."

"I'll help in any way I can," said Clark. "But I don't see how I could manage to enter the ship alone; you know our regulations concerning that."

"Tomorrow night, I will call to you after our regular session. You will come back to the ship accompanied by your minimum commission. Inside, my five robot forms can take care of the additional people. In order to keep you from being branded a traitor I will make a show of forcing you also. When the work is finished, you will all be released and I will depart; there should be no difficulty whatever. I anticipate it will require about three and a half hours to perform the work."

"But the robot forms will be out of commission part of the time!"

"Yes. That is a risk that must be taken. Your companions will be locked up. It will be late, and there should be no reason for anyone else entering the ship. But for about two hours, I will be helpless and you will be on your own. Are you willing to take that chance?"

V

AFTER HAIN EGOETH had gone, Clark kept seeing in the darkness the image of the scientist who had been shot for trying to steal material from the ship. If he, Jackson, were caught—or even suspected of willingly participating in the escape of the robot—he would receive an equally merciless treatment.

In contrast with the sessions of previous days, the following one seemed interminably long. Clark felt his nervousness must be apparent to everyone. He made swift, copious notes to hide his anxiety, but he could not control the intermittent trembling of his fingers as he wrote.

The session finally ended. Clark remained seated in order to be at the end of the crowd leaving the ship. George motioned irritably for him to come along. "Let's go. I'm really beat tonight."

Then, as they started away from the table and moved down the corridor Hain Egoth called out to them. "General Demars, I wonder if I could speak with you for a few minutes?"

George stopped and turned. "Yes, if necessary. But we'll have to get our minimum committee; can't it wait until tomorrow?"

"I'm afraid not. There is something particularly urgent I must discuss with you. I will appreciate it if you will get your other members and remain."

"O. K." George swore under his breath and went out, Clark following.

It took a few minutes to gather up the protesting members of their group, and by that time—Clark noted with satisfaction—nearly all the others had left the building.

"What is it we should wait for?" growled the Russian irritably. "There is nothing that remains unfinished. This is most unusual."

"I don't know," said George, "but the sooner we get it over with the better. The robot's got something on his mind."

The moment they reached the upper deck of the study chamber again, the five robot forms stepped out from hiding and seized the members of the party. The tentacles wrapped like steel bands about them.

The men gaped in astonishment at the multiple figures, of which they had assumed there was only one.

"What the devil is this?" exclaimed George. "Turn us loose before—"

"Yes?" said Hain Egoth. "Before what?"

The General ceased his struggles and tried to stand upright with dignity. "Please explain this," he said coldly.

"You have provided your own explanation," said Hain Egoth; "there is no other necessary. You have been offered the gift of the gods and you wallow like pigs in the mud."

Clark had been seized by one of the robots who also held another of the party. A tentacle circled his arms and chest with unnecessary strength, and he sensed it was capable of cutting a man in two if the robot desired.

They were led to a chamber at a far side of the room and thrust through to a bare metal room, all except Clark.

"I have need of this man," said the robot. "When he has completed his task for me you will all be freed. I do not wish to harm you, but do not make attempts to break out."

THE ROOM was not meant to be a prison. The latch on the door was a simple one. The robot broke off the inner lever and made it unopenable from there. He assured Clark that it was safe. "Now let us hurry," he said.

Clark found that, surprisingly enough, his tension and nervousness had vanished by the time Hain Egoth led him down to the control room and showed him the location of the brain mechanism. It was a chamber to which none of the Earthmen had been admitted.

The robot unfastened the massive covers that hid the mechanism and Clark gasped at the sight of it. Unconsciously he had assumed that perhaps there was a small box containing a few intricate relays or tubes of some sort, but he was wholly unprepared for the mass of components which he saw.

More than this, he was dismayed by the size involved. They were minute in the extreme—some almost microscopic, and thousands of them were mounted on layers of supporting strips. Interconnections seemed to be made with a spiderweb material that looked fragile enough to be broken by a breath.

"I can't—" Clark stammered.

"Yes," said Hain Egoth. "Please put on this receptor and plug into the panel there; this is part of the working time of which I spoke."

Clark sat down and attached a small button to the side of his head. For an hour there flowed to his mind a flood of information so complex and detailed that it seemed utterly beyond his conscious under-

standing, yet he was aware that it was being deposited in circuits of his mind where it would be available when he wished to call for it.

At the conclusion of the forced indoctrination he felt exhausted by the flow of energy demanded of him, and yet his actual task had not yet begun. But as he scanned the extensive mechanism once more, he felt an indefinable surge of certainty that he knew precisely what was the function of each of the many thousands of components and that he could do anything the robot asked of him in respect to it.

"I am ready," he said.

"Yes—it is time to begin."

The robot form took up a position from which he could see the brain-mechanism, and Clark's hands as they began the task of dismantling. Vision and speech remained with the robot, but otherwise the metallic creature became lifeless.

The bullet had penetrated the skin just slightly from below and had torn out a sizable mass of components at the bottom of the assembly. For an hour Clark tore out the burned and damaged parts, feeling almost as if he were a surgeon operating on an actual brain.

With the wound cleansed, as he thought of it to himself, he turned to the spare parts cabinet and began drawing upon the vast store of multiple units to replace in order to reconnect the brain to the control system of the vessel.

Swiftly, he began the work of replacement, using the gossamer wire he found was unbreakable in his hands. He worked from the control end toward the brain itself, in order to get these circuits in place before reconnecting the brain-mechanism to the robot forms.

Suddenly he heard a cry of alarm from Hain Egoth. "They are coming! Your men are closing in on the ship from all directions, as nearly as I can tell. Don't let them find you here. Let your companions out and tell them you were forced to work on the mechanism and managed to disable it and escape. They will believe you and you will save yourself."

Clark hesitated. He looked up to the immobile face of the robot where the mechanical eyes still showed their faint luminescence. He looked down at the great mechanism under his hands. There would never be another chance; this was it.

Only one thing seemed to hold him back. He had a moment's vision of the derisive face of George Demars. Then it was gone. "I'll finish," he said. "There may be time."

For a long time the robot said nothing, but Clark thought he could

feel those eyes upon him. "I wish my people could have known you, Clark Jackson," he said.

CLARK INCREASED his speed to the limit. A new purpose formed in his mind and he prayed there would be time to carry it out. Then, while he was still bent over the assembly he heard a step beyond him. He did not look up; he knew whose footstep it would be.

"Get away, Clark," said George. "Get away from that machine or I'll kill you."

"You'll have to kill me," said Clark. "I'd like to know how you found out, though."

"There was a microphone in your room. Do you think we would leave anyone unwatched with something as important as this? Even your nightmares were monitored. Get your hands off that machine!"

Clark's left hand rested on a small lever near his head. "As long as my hands are here I believe I am safe," he said. "Even if you shoot, I can accomplish that which needs to be done as I fall."

"What is that?"

"Don't you know? The outside port is open. In three seconds we can be fifty thousand feet in the air, and if the cold and vacuum doesn't kill us, the acceleration will."

He looked up a moment and was surprised to see that George's face was agonized and beaded with sweat as he knew his own to be.

"I don't believe it," said George. "The others will be here in a moment. We can carry you away without any shooting or fussing." He turned an instant and bawled, "Lieutenant! This way—"

"Don't let anyone come any closer than you are."

Desperately Clark looked down at the mechanism. No more than a dozen connections remained undone to keep him from making good his threat, but George couldn't know that. He kept one hand on the control rod and worked swiftly with the other one. He tried to keep up the conversation to keep George off balance.

"I don't understand why you let me get this far if you overheard my conversation with Hain Egoth. Why didn't you arrest me then?"

"Because I wanted to save you," said George. "You are a man I can't afford to arrest. Ten men of top-drawer abilities couldn't do the work you've done in the past; and now I need you here."

"But you have hardly saved me," said Clark. "You are either going to have to shoot me, or I am going to set the ship into space and kill us all."

"I am not going to shoot you," said George softly, "and you are not going to pull that lever.

"If I had arrested you last night, you would have frozen up and been lost to us forever. I had to let you go; I had to let you see the complete failure of any attempt to stop us from obtaining this gift of the gods, as you call it. Maybe you're right in that; maybe it can make gods of the people who possess it. We're going to find out, and nothing on Earth can stop us. You tried and you have failed. Now come back and help us."

Clark felt an instant of stunned incredulity as he realized that George meant what he said. George would forgive him and put him back on the commission, even now.

SUDDENLY every instant of his life in which he had known George Demars came into focus. He saw again the arrogance of the college man who could do anything you named twice as good as anybody else could do it; who could solve a differential equation, and play a Brahms concerto, and flaunt a yellow convertible, and steal somebody else's girl.

"This ship isn't a yellow Cadillac," said Clark quietly.

George's eyes widened as if he had been slapped in the face, then an unbelieving pity came into them. His gun hand wavered. "All these years—" he murmured. "So many years have gone by, and you're still thinking of that."

A pair of lieutenants appeared behind George. Clark tightened his fingers on the lever. He had finished the final connection. "Don't let them come any nearer," he said.

George motioned them back, but kept his service revolver leveled.

"What a word you chose," Clark went on as evenly, as if they were talking over some hospitable dinner table. "You speak of saving me—and yet perhaps that is the right word, after all. That's what you do to people, isn't it? You save them for your own private use. If my defeat gives you any pleasure now, make the most of it."

"You fool!" George cried. "Won't you ever learn? Won't you ever have guts enough to stand up on your own two feet, and take what you want and have a right to? All your life you've sold yourself short; now you're willing to do the same for the whole human race.

"You could have had Ellen Pond—did you know that, Clark? She cried the night I brought her back to the dance and you were gone; she cried because of what you would think. I should have told you.

Maybe it would have made a difference if I had. But I didn't, because you didn't have enough of what it takes to be worth a girl like Ellen; you still don't.

"If you think I'm a liar, prove it. Don't you think I know what it means to turn this science loose before we're able to give it an orderly assimilation? Maybe you're right; maybe it will destroy us instead of nourishing us. But we've got a right to find out, a right to have a positive answer, instead of never knowing and forever regretting what we might have had.

"It takes guts to find out a real answer to this kind of question. It doesn't take any to sneak behind our backs and try to destroy our only chance of finding out. If you've got any, take your hand off that lever and—"

Almost simultaneously, there was the tiniest visible contraction of Clark's wrist muscles and the thunderous roar of the gunshot.

Clark's hand flung upward reflexively at the crash of pain in his chest. He staggered a moment on his knees and gasped and fell slowly on his side.

George let the gun drop from his fingers. A sick agony exploded within him as he saw the bright blood spurting. He moved around the mass of the robot brain and knelt beside the physicist.

Clark's eyes remained open, searching wildly as if for something on which to focus. Then they caught sight of George's face and held steady for just an instant. "You always win," he murmured. "This ship is a lot better than a yellow Cadillac, isn't it?"

He closed his eyes and then made one last strenuous effort. "I've hated your guts all my life," he said fervently.

After a time George rose to his feet, his arms hanging limp at his sides. He stared at the dead physicist, and at the remains of the robot. The mechanical eyes watched him, but Hain Egoth had not spoken. He wondered if they could restore the mechanical creature to full life once more. He knew they couldn't restore Clark Jackson.

"I should have told you," he murmured to the dead man. "Maybe if you'd had Ellen, it would have made a difference; you had more than enough of what it takes. But how can any of us ever know whether we're right or whether we're wrong?"

"We can only follow what we believe, but how can we ever know?"





NOVELET

RIPENESS

by M. C. PEASE

illustrated by ED EMSH

*The times demanded Marcus, and Marcus had
done more than any other dictator in history.
But could he take the step that was required
now?*

PHILLIP REYNOLDS sat slumped in a chair in the room that served him both as office and living-room. His eyes were tired and his mouth bitter as he watched the televised scene on the wall before him. The picture was of the trial even then going on in the bleak building not very far away. A man was weeping his penitence at daring to think that Marcus, the Director, was less than ideal. It was a horrible spectacle to Phillip. The man would die, executed as a public enemy. But the worst was the knowledge this gave that drugs and torture could so destroy the man's self-respect as to make him beg thus

publicly for death. And the thing that made Phillip's soul writhe was the knowledge that he, himself, had been the kingmaker for Marcus.

Director of the World, Marcus was; omnipotent despot over all mankind. And why? Because he, Phillip, had given Marcus the power to bring order where there had been none. "Matilda", they called her, the tool whose making had been Phillip's life. Matilda, because, like a maiden aunt, she was obsessed with details, gathering together the stray threads of gossip and hazy information to build herself a picture of the world. A thing of steel and tungsten and rare elements mixed in a crazy network. A maze of incomprehensible detail, through which small pulses of electricity deftly wove their way—each carrying one small unit of trivial information. A computer, gathering in the news of the world; noting the death of Wong How and the birth of John Smith; observing that Jose Riccardo had lost his job, and that Joe Grundy had bought a refrigerator. The data to organize a world and to save the world from chaos.

Without Matilda, the Decade of Chaos would have been a Century unless the dissolution of anarchy had stopped it sooner; with it, Marcus had first organized his own home-country, the Western States. Then, using the Computer as a tool of empire, he had mediated the argument between Eastern America and Canada, and ended up with both of them in his control. Then he had moved on, with a skill that was not his own, settling quarrels, offering hope, and becoming director of the world. He had given peace; he had given freedom from starvation and from uncertainty; he had controlled the unknown winds of economic fortune. And if, with it, he had also brought slavery, Marcus, at least, felt this was only right.

For Phillip Reynolds, watching the telecast of the trial, the moral question was not answered: had it been right to give this weapon to Marcus? Reynolds had not wondered what the results would be; he had always known. And yet, it had seemed to him there were no alternatives other than tyranny or anarchy. Without control there could only have been collapse; and for control there had to be a strong man, a director. It was a terrible price to pay for time, but it had seemed to Reynolds that mankind must have time at any price.

And yet, he wondered.

His brother did not think so. Peter Reynolds was quite sure that nothing was worth the price, and he had been most bitter in telling Phillip his opinion. Five years ago, that had been. Phillip still remem-

bered that evening, and his brother's unyielding contempt. He had tried to explain; he had tried then, and often since—but never had gotten even a flicker of answering understanding. And finally he had stopped. He had given up going to Stilton University where Peter taught. He had stopped trying, but he had not ever stopped wishing things were different between them. And he had not stopped wondering who was right—Phillip or Peter.

THE DOOR burst open to shatter his meditations; Selma and Dirk came tumbling in. These two always amused him, even when they irritated him. But Reynolds could see in each of them some part of himself—himself as he had been, thirty years ago when Matilda had been only a dream. It somehow described himself, he thought, that these two were the mirrored images of that almost-forgotten youth, and yet that they could not get along with each other.

He thought of Selma as the mirror of his heart. This was odd; her specialty was philosophy, though her title only called her his special assistant. Philosophy was supposed to be a cold and unemotional subject; but, then, with Selma, it was far from cold and unemotional. She brought an intense and passionate belief to it; to her, the reign of Marcus the Director was a purgatory for mankind, something to be endured for the sake of a world to be built when it was over. Phillip cherished this dream of an ultimate answer.

Dirk, on the other hand, was a semanticist and cyberneticist. More clearly than anyone, even Phillip, he understood the flow of information through the Computer. And scientists, too, are supposed to be cold, but he was not. He loved Matilda, quite literally. And whatever Matilda might make of the world, however she might be used, was irrelevant before the Computer's perfection.

The two of them, Selma and Dirk, were hardly able to nod to each other without fighting.

"Boss," Selma spat out, "this is it. I quit; I resign. Not you or all the lousy secret police can make me do another lick of work here." She bounced into a chair and looked grim.

Phillip raised an eyebrow at her and half grinned. Then he looked at Dirk. "What's the matter with her?" he asked.

Dirk shrugged. "I don't know; she's gone bats. As far as I know there's nothing new."

"Look," Selma cut in, "this is our chance, the best chance in a long time. Only we got to move fast. And this fool won't do it."

"Do you think it might help if I knew what you were talking about?" Reynolds asked.

The girl looked surprised, then she smiled. "Sorry," she chuckled. "I guess I'm not making much sense. It's the Thorndike cell that Matilda picked up six months ago." Phillip knew what she was talking about. The Computer handled an enormous amount of quite trivial data, but the pieces often fitted together in very non-trivial ways. In particular, they often added up to conspiracy, the pattern of revolution. To build their revolution, people had to do things; word of what they did was fed into Matilda, and she could then deduce their purpose. The Secret Police did not know this; no one at the Computer had bothered to tell them, and the outward channels were blocked so that the information could be had only on the control boards inside the Computer. But at those boards, each separate group that tried for revolution could be, and was, followed by interested people. The "Thorndike Cell", named for the first person identified as a part of it, was one such group.

"I don't want anything to happen to them," Selma continued. "They're not like the usual bunch of neurotic troublemakers that make up most cells. These people are decent folk, and they have brains, too. College teachers, professional people. The kind that really can build a new world. They're not just revolting *against*, but they're working *for* what they believe in. They're different, and I don't want to see them squashed."

"Who's squashing them?" Phillip asked. "Dirk?"

"No." She was contemptuous. "It's the police; according to Matilda, the police are getting suspicious, beginning to track them down." It would have interested the Secret Police—interested them greatly—to know how much about them Matilda could deduce.

"Oh? And what do you want Dirk to do? Or not do?" Phillip asked.

SHE LEANED forward. "Help them! You can do it. Matilda's got the power, enormous power. Just juggle the figures a bit. Make other people do things that will throw the police off. I don't know what; you guys are the experts on Matilda. You tell me. But do something."

"I keep telling her there's nothing we can do," Dirk said in an exasperated voice. "The Computer either works, or she doesn't; and if she doesn't, the roof falls in—complete and utter chaos. Sure, I'd like

to help them; but I don't want to upset the world for the sake of a handful of people with ideals."

"There must be some way," Selma cried. "The Computer's too powerful for there not to be a way to use it."

"No," Dirk drawled. "The cobalt bomb is powerful, too, but there's no way you can use it without using all of its power. Sure, we could shut down the Computer. Then Marcus and the entire Directory would be so busy trying to keep the world from collapsing, they'd have no time at all for a little thing like a conspiracy. So we burn down the house to light our cigarette; that's not what we want."

"I'm afraid Dirk's right," Reynolds said, and his voice was sad. "At least, I don't know of any way to get the Computer to juggle things just a little bit. It's either all or none; and I don't think even you want that." He wished there were something he could do. He felt the guilt that lay upon him for the original decision he had made, to be Marcus' tool; but Phillip did not know what he could do now.

"Then I quit." The girl's lips were thin. "It's time to stand up or shut up, and I'm not going to sit in here like a mouse and watch the mighty Marcus sit in sated power. I'm going out and get me a job where I can help the revolution; maybe I'll go to Stilton U. and find the Thorndike group itself."

Phillip sat up straight with a start. "Stilton University? Is that...? My brother, is he in this?"

Selma gazed at him with wide eyes. "I don't know," she said. "I never thought."

Phillip jumped to his feet, and strode across the room. Pushing back the curtains that hung there, he switched on the lights of the control-board that the curtains had concealed. It was a simple-looking thing. Three small cathode ray screens; a few colored lights; a typewriter without keys and one with keys; and a battery of numbered buttons—that was all. But it was the main control-board of the vast Computer that was Matilda. Reynolds sat down in the chair before it, and turned a switch that gave it life.

Phillip moved with practiced speed. One hand, on the panel of buttons, punched out a coded sequence. A screen responded, lighting with a symbol to describe its interpretation of that sequence; the machine was ready to receive a query. Another sequence and another symbol. It recognized the authority of the interrogator to ask questions it would not otherwise have answered. A third sequence and the area of questioning was defined. Revolution. A fourth, and it was narrowed to

the Thorndike cell. Only then did Reynolds move to the keyed typewriter and type, "*Probable present composition and percentage of probable assurance. Query.*" The second typewriter, the one without keys, typed the question with him, then spaced to give the answer.

The wait was too short to be noticeable by human observation, but it began to type the answer—before Phillip's eyes, the list of names grew. But all he saw was the one in second place: "*Second in command—Peter Reynolds—93%.*" There was shock on his face as he sat there staring at it. His brother, second-in-command! And with an assurance of 93% that this was true!

IT WAS A long moment after the typewriter had stopped that Phillip bent forward again and typed: "*Repeat conditions. Probable present plans of revolutionary nature and percentage of probable assurance. Query.*" And the second typewriter answered: "*2nd query. Assassination of Marcus while leaving the Anniversary Celebration. 78%.*"

Phillip's face was dead as he typed again: "*Repeat conditions. Further second query. Probability of success. Query.*" His face did not move as he read the answer: "*3rd query. 0.8%.*" And still his face was cold as he typed: "*Repeat conditions. Probability of arrest of Peter Reynolds within one year from present. Query.*" But his eyes blinked as he saw the answer: "*4th query. 98.6%.*"

Once more Phillip moved to ask the machine a question: "*Repeat conditions. Further 4th query. Probability of arrest of Peter Reynolds prior to action noted response 2nd query. Query.*" He smiled slightly as the other typewriter answered: "*5th query. 3.4%.*" At least his brother was not apt to be arrested before the Celebration.

His hand looked as if it moved of its own intent as it punched out on the buttons the sequence to switch off the board. The man himself seemed in a state of shock.

There were two weeks before the Anniversary Celebration in honor of the final union of the whole world in the slavery of Marcus. Two weeks of grace; two weeks of life for Peter. That was all. If anything could be done, there was only two weeks in which to do it.

II

AFTER SITTING hunched for several minutes, Phillip Reynolds got up and started pacing back and forth. Selma looked at him; then she looked at Dirk and got up herself. "I guess

this isn't the time to press my resignation. Anyway, he's all stirred up, which is what I wanted to do anyway. So let's get out of here." Dirk nodded, a sardonic expression in his eyes. He wondered if he should point out that it was not her threat to quit that had stirred Phillip up; it had taken the knowledge that Peter was in danger to do it. But he shrugged, mentally. Selma was not a girl to try to fool herself, and he doubted if it would be an effective taunt. So, without saying anything, he just followed her out.

It was about a minute later that the door opened again and Rance came in. Rance Kirsten was huge—in width at least. A vast mountain of a man with a face that rarely showed emotion, and whose eyes seemed perpetually hidden beneath rolls of flesh. He sighed slightly as he lowered himself carefully into a chair. He did not like exertion and, in fact, rarely even left his room.

Phillip nodded at him vaguely. He knew Kirsten as a remarkable man, thinking of him as an extension of the Computer, for Rance had a strange faculty of intuition. The fat man, he knew, spent his time sprawled in a comfortable chair watching a large screen he had had built into one wall of his room. Across that screen moved the data being carried on various channels that Rance selected, apparently at random. How much of the information Kirsten absorbed, Phillip did not know; but he did know that out of it Rance somehow synthesized an awareness of the future that even the Computer could not give.

"Hi," the big man grunted. "Thought you might want to talk to me." Phillip looked at him in surprise. It was true; he did want to talk to Rance—but he had not known it until now. And how had Rance known? He shrugged, and rapidly told the other what the problem was. "And what do I do now?" he ended.

Rance blinked. "What do you want to do?" he asked.

"Well," Phillip said slowly, his face furrowed with thought, "I want to save my brother, of course. He's eight years younger than me, you know; I guess I got in the habit of taking care of him when we were kids. But there's more than that. He's an idealist; thinks people should be free, and that Marcus is about the worst thing that ever happened to the world. He's never forgiven me for letting Marcus use the Computer to build his empire. And the worst of it is that he may be right.

"I thought mankind needed a strong hand to do the reorganizing that had to be done. I thought it needed time, and that even Marcus was not too high a price to pay for time. But I'm not sure, and Peter

could be right that that's too high a price for anything. If he is right, and if he dies for his beliefs, then I'm the one who killed him, for it's I who gave Marcus his power." There was a bitter twist to his mouth and he paced back and forth for a minute in silence.

"And there's more, too," Reynolds finally continued. "I never thought of Marcus as more than a temporary answer. But he's too strong. Eventually, I suppose, he'll fall; if it's a slow dissolution, or if it comes by the chaos of revolution, what happens then? What comes after? Do we go back to chaos and wars and economic turbulence? Maybe it's up to me to do something; maybe if I don't, the time I've bought will go for nothing. But what can I do?" He turned to the fat man, desperation on his face.

"You know," Rance said, his voice low, "we talk a lot about revolution in here. When do you suppose they're going to arrest us for it?"

PHILLIP looked at him in surprise. "Us?" He was however, almost used to Rance's wandering methods of discussion. "Oh, they won't arrest us; they tried to several years ago. We had a big argument. Told them I wouldn't stand for it, and convinced them I meant it. They knew they needed the Computer and that there wasn't anybody else could run it. So, there was a lot of face-saving, but it kind of worked out that they don't come in here, and we don't go out there."

He smiled, remembering that period. Vane, the head of the Secret Police, had writhed in frustration; he had panted and fumed and roared. But in the end, confronted with Reynolds' unwavering logic, he had collapsed into sullen silence. And quietly Phillip had built his walls, using the full talents of some very smart people, and of the Computer, to keep Vane from ever getting knowledge of what went on inside the sanctuary of the Computer building.

"So you don't think they find out what goes on here?" Kirsten asked. "Well, maybe they don't; but if I were Vane, I'd at least have my spies in here; wouldn't you?"

"Sure," Phillip shrugged. "He probably does. Only they can't send word out; all they can do is walk out themselves, and then we don't let them back. So their spies don't do them much good."

"No," Rance agreed. "Except that if we started actively plotting, then that would be news that it would be worth sacrificing a spy for, wouldn't it? So it seems like it's kind of a stalemate between us and Vane, doesn't it?"

"You mean that we're safe as long as we don't start mixing in?"

Phillip swung toward the fat man, a puzzled look on his face. "Sure. But so what? That's what I pointed out to Vane long ago, and you must have known this." He paused, and then his face lit up. "Or are you just reminding me?" Suddenly he drooped. "But that is true. There's nothing I can do; any funny stuff and I cut our own throats."

Rance heaved himself out of his chair and waddled to the door. After he had opened it, he turned and looked back at Phillip. "Nothing wrong with 'funny stuff'. The only thing you can't do is plot. Subtlety—that's what you got to avoid like the poison." He started to swing around, but stopped and looked back again. "One other thing. A piece of information for you that you can't get from Matilda. Marcus is strong now, as strong as he's going to get. From here out it's a downward road for him, a fight to hold what he's got, and he probably knows it." This time he did leave, closing the door gently as Phillip started to ask him some more questions.

Staring at the closed door, Phillip asked himself questions. What, he wondered, had Rance been driving at? He wished he understood the man better; sometimes it seemed as if the man enjoyed being cryptic. Maybe he did. Anyway, it seemed clear that Kirsten did have some idea of what might be done. From his last words, it almost sounded as if he thought this was the ideal time. But ideal for what? That was the question. What could be done? Selma wanted to juggle the Computer so that it would give false answers—not false enough to worry Marcus or his people, but just enough to give the revolutionists a break. Dirk did not think it could be done. For himself, Reynolds was sure it could not be. Not by changing the orders to the Computer or juggling its codes. Perhaps it could be accomplished by cutting into the transmission lines, to put in false information and wrong orders. But that would take activity, and Kirsten had pointed out that that would be sure suicide. No, Rance must have some other answer, and Phillip could not think what it might be.

IT WAS LATE at night, after many hours of intense concentration, that Reynolds finally thought he saw the light. He was frightened at the answer. It would be he who took the risk of it, and if it failed, it would be he who paid the penalty by starring in the next big trial. But it did seem to have a chance of working.

He started to pick up the phone to call Rance, and maybe Selma and Dirk, but he stopped. It would be far better if none of them knew what he planned. Safer for them, and perhaps even safer for him and

for his plan. And maybe that had been in Kirsten's mind, too—that he should not tell the exact details. Maybe Rance had some good reason for not wanting to know the details. No, it was his show, alone, Phillip Reynolds decided; and he would have to do it alone.

After once more going over his plan in detail, Phillip finally sat down in the chair of the Computer control unit. His fingers flew, and symbols danced across the screen in answer to his questions and his orders. Twice he checked his results to make sure there was no error in what he had done; and then, very carefully, he erased the record of what he had done. With a final checking of the results, he nodded in satisfaction and closed down the unit.

Moving to the phone-box he pushed the button and spoke a series of numbers. The voice that answered him was cold and impersonal. "Let me speak to Vane," Phillip said. The voice answered him: "Mr. Vane is not available." There was the barest accent on the title. Reynolds made his voice equally cold. "This is Phillip Reynolds; I wish to speak to Vane. You will please inform him." There was a moment's silence, and then the voice accepted, and asked him to hold the line.

It was a full minute before he heard Vane's rasping voice: "Vane here." Phillip leaned forward, his eyes glazed with concentration, his voice slow and careful: "Mr. Vane, I have matters of considerable importance to communicate. Will you please arrange an appointment for me and yourself with Marcus in the morning."

"What are these matters?" the Police Commissioner asked.

"That I will explain tomorrow," Phillip said; "not tonight." He tried to put finality in his voice.

"You will tell me what you know," Vane said, "and I will be the one to decide if it is a matter for Marcus' ear."

"That is impossible," Reynolds answered. "Actually, this is not a Police matter. I would, however, like to have you present when I discuss it with Marcus. If you don't care to cooperate, I shall have to proceed without you. This will take longer, of course, and time is very short. However, I am prepared to accept this delay if you insist; if you do, I believe you will ultimately regret your decision."

He smiled and his eyes glinted as, after a moment's pause, he went on: "You will also remember that, through the Computer, I have access to knowledge that you do not. What I will discuss with Marcus is based on that knowledge. It is not, however, directly concerned with revolution. I do not expect, for example, to mention your connection with the man known as Rimaldi."

All of the people high in service of Marcus had their own hidden connections, as the Computer had deduced. Rimaldi, a powerful man in the underworld, was Vane's chief ace-in-the-hole. "I would prefer, as I say, to have you there, but it is not really essential." A little blackmail Phillip thought, might get results.

Vane was quiet for a moment. When he did speak, his voice was carefully controlled, giving no sign of what he might be feeling. "Very well, Reynolds, I will see what I can do." The light on the box went out, indicating the connection was broken.

He had won his point, Phillip knew; Vane was perhaps the one man in all the world who could always get to see Marcus on request. Not that Marcus trusted him; quite the contrary. But Marcus trusted no one else, and Vane was the one most likely to bring him news of the others.

So now, Phillip thought, he was committed. This was the point beyond which there was no possibility of withdrawal. Vane knew now that something was afoot, and he would not rest until he knew what that something was. Now, whether his plan was good or bad, he must go through with it.

THE NEXT morning, in answer to Vane's summons, Phillip called a car and left the Computer building. Not having been outside the building for better than six months, he stopped a moment at the door to breathe unfiltered air, and to remember the feel of wind on his cheek.

As he stepped to the car, two men fell in a step behind him, one on each side. They did not say anything, and neither did Reynolds. He was not surprised; this was routine whenever he left the sanctuary of the building. And when he got in the car, one of them sat beside him, while the other sat beside the driver.

At the door to the private offices of Marcus, he was, according to custom, made to strip and then examined with X-ray and with other instruments. Finally donning the silk robes provided for all guests, and noting with his usual amusement how skillfully they were designed to hamper motion, he was admitted to the anteroom. Vane was already there, dressed in a similar robe, standing in the center of the room looking impassive.

The Police Commissioner gave him a hard look and a nod. Probably, Reynolds thought, Vane would love to ask him questions but

did not dare since the room was no doubt well equipped with listening devices. Phillip sat down in a chair and prepared to wait.

It was not a long wait, as these things went. About an hour and a quarter, Phillip noted, before a man opened a door and nodded to them to come in. They entered side by side, pacing off in measured steps the carpet that led up the long hall toward the desk at its end. That desk was the only furniture in the room. On the walls, there were maps of the world, and overhead there were the patterns of the constellations. Did that mean, Phillip wondered, that Marcus claimed the allegiance, not only of the world but of the stars as well? But he did not let the smile that was in his mind show on his face.

III

THE DESK itself was so big as to dwarf the man behind it; and yet, you could not ignore the man—for there was a magnetism to him that commanded all attention. His eyes were dark and brooding, deepset in his hawklike face. The mouth was a grim slit that turned down at the corners. The man himself was probably small. He did not often let himself be seen standing, but his shoulders were broad and he looked powerful; and his hands were big and brutal. He looked at Vane.

The two of them gave the conventional salute, and then Vane spoke: "Sir, this man, Phillip Reynolds, who is Operating Chief of the Computer, has requested this interview. With your permission, I will let him speak."

The director's eyes gleamed with malice. "You mean you don't know why he's here?" His voice was deep and resonant, an excellent speaking voice. "What kind of a hold does he have over you? No matter; we will hear what he has to say." And he looked over towards Phillip.

"Marcus, sir," Phillip said, hesitating just a moment to collect his thoughts, "you stand now as the ruler of the entire world. Under you, the world has learned to live in peace, without fear of hunger or of the cold; you will be recorded in history as the man who has achieved what no man has done before. Napoleon, Bismark, Hitler, Stalin, these and others had the same dream as you. But they failed, and you have succeeded."

Marcus nodded slightly. "This I know; are you flattering me, or are you leading up to something?"

"Marcus, sir, I am trying to say that you now stand at a turning point. Because you have succeeded, you have an opportunity before you that no man has ever had before." He paused, but the director said nothing, only looked at him with guarded eyes. "A man who accomplishes so much as you have, must act in that accomplishment against the dreams of many other men. These other men are little people; perhaps you do not think them worth considering—and perhaps they are not. And yet, it is the irony of history that it is those same small people—or their children—who will judge you; it is they who will determine the name that you will carry through the coming centuries."

"You are long-winded, Mr. Reynolds," the director said. "What are you proposing?"

"Marcus, sir," Phillip answered, "you are now at the peak of your power. Nothing remains for you to do except to fight to hold that power. Unless... Unless you use that power to build the future of mankind."

"I was under the impression," Marcus said, his voice dry, "that I had already built that future; did you not say so yourself?"

"Marcus, sir," Phillip hesitated, to choose his words with care, "I have said that you have built an empire of the world. But you, sir, must know better than anyone else that you have not yet built the future; that will be built by your lieutenants. Sarno has the army. It is his; so much is official.

"But you must also know that seventeen percent of that army does not exist, and that the money so diverted is used to finance his own spy system.

"Lemark has the industry of the world; this, too, is official. But steel and other industries report no profit, and that is false. And the profits that are not there, are used for arms hidden near his labor camps; this, too, you must know. And Vane, I am sure, will confirm my words."

He looked at the Police Commissioner who stared back at him impassively. Phillip shrugged and went on: "Ferrar, Richards, Berrin, and the others. These are smaller men and their opportunities are more limited. But each has a similar story.

"Where is your future there, Marcus, sir? You balance their powers, playing this one against that. You are a master of this juggling. But someday you will weaken. Someday you will grow tired or bored.

What then, Marcus, sir? I am quite confident, sir, that you know better than anyone else what uncertainty there lies in the future."

THE DIRECTOR'S face was completely impassive. "And what, Mr. Reynolds," he said, "are you proposing that I do?"

Phillip bit his lip, and his eyes shifted for a moment, but then he straightened up. "Marcus, sir, I am proposing that you do what no other dictator has ever done. Others have risen when the time was ripe for strong personal rule, and organization; some have honestly believed that what they did was for the ultimate good of mankind. But none have been able to relinquish power when that time was ripe, and because they wouldn't, all they built decayed within a generation or less—where it was not destroyed in the wars they invoked in order to retain their power.

"I am proposing, Marcus, sir, that you go farther than they did—that you earn yourself the title in history of the man who not only unified the world, and saved it from chaos—but also of the man who unified it in freedom and in love. It would be a wonderful thing, sir, if, at your Anniversary Celebration, while acknowledging the acclaim of the world, you should also announce that you would, six months from thence, resign your leadership in favor of a democracy of the world. And that you were even then calling together a congress of the world's thinkers to devise a constitution for that democracy. This, sir, would be a wonderful thing, and one that would truly earn you a unique place in history."

The director smiled slightly while he thought a moment. Then he looked at the Police Commissioner. "Vane," he said, "our friend, here is suffering from a surfeit of idealism. I think he needs a rest, and perhaps a bit of treatment. Will you see to it? But," he held up his hand, "nothing violent. When he is cured, I shall expect him to continue to run his Computer, so, be careful. Cure him, but don't kill him."

"Yes, sir." Vane smiled, and it was a grim smile. And grasping Phillip's arm, he turned the Computer man around and marched him out a side door.

Reynolds, feeling that implacable hand on his arm, trembled at what lay ahead. He had no illusions of what the "cure" might mean; he had no illusions at all about the nature of the police state that was the world under Marcus. And yet, there was also gladness in his heart. Now he was not only committed to the plan—his plan—but he

was actually started on it. Now the dice were cast, and rolling to their destined end.

And there was something more. In himself Phillip Reynolds recognized some certain masochistic pleasure at the thought of what lay before him. There was a sense of satisfaction in it, a feeling of ultimate justice. It was he who had made Marcus—quite deliberately, and with full knowledge of what he was doing. It was, in a sense, irrelevant that he had created the director only to save the world, that Reynolds still believed that there had been no other way to save humanity. People had suffered because of it. They had died; their souls had been tortured and drugged out of them, their pride destroyed with malice. It was fitting that he should suffer in his turn, even in the act of retribution.

And Peter. Peter did not believe in him; his brother thought him a traitor to humanity, and had rejected him. There was an irony in the thought that he should be made to suffer to save the boy from the folly of a doomed revolt. And Phillip was amused to think that by and in this act, he hoped to prove that Peter was wrong.

He was afraid, but also he was other things.

IV

IT WAS THE morning of the fifth day that Phillip Reynolds was taken out of the bleak building where he had spent those five eternities, and was brought to a waiting car. When the car had brought him to the Computer building, the guards were not gentle as they pulled him out. And when, finally, they shoved him through the door of what had been his own office, they took positions just inside with guns held ready in their fists.

Through eyes that could not focus well, he saw that Vane was seated in his favorite chair. The main people of his group were standing uneasily along the opposite wall—Selma, Dirk, Rance Kirsten, Henry Cortson of Maintenance, Ralph Martin of Personnel, Jim Coster of Purchasing. Behind the Police Commissioner were several uniformed men, quite undistinguished except by the brutality of their faces.

Phillip straightened up and threw a smile at his own people. Then he nodded curtly at the policeman. "Hi, Vane. Or must I now say Mr. Vane?"

"I don't care what you call me," the other said, his voice rasping harshly. "Just do the job you're here for. Or else."

Phillip opened up his mouth to answer when there was a sudden commotion at the door behind him. He turned to see it swing open and two men in the uniform of Marcus' own guard enter. Behind them were two others. The first pair stalked across the room where they turned to look with hard eyes around the room. The second two stayed near the door. "Mr. Vane," one of them said, his voice cold and impersonal. "You will have your men leave; they may find a nearby room to wait."

Vane was startled. Then he jumped to his feet and motioned his men out with a jerk of his head.

There was a moment's pause while the room waited with quick breath; then suddenly two more uniformed men came in, these with their guns in their hands. At their signal, the other guards drew their guns. Then Marcus entered and quietly sat down in the chair. He nodded at Vane's salute and said: "I was told you had brought Mr. Reynolds here. I will handle this myself."

"I... I... Certainly sir." The Commissioner was clearly flabbergasted. "I thought I could handle it myself and did not want to bother you. But I will be most happy to..." His voice trailed off.

"It does not matter whether you could or not," the director said. "Without the Computer, the State is in jeopardy, and the affair is certainly worth my own interest."

"I don't really think it's that serious, sir," Vane said. He would have gone on, but the director interrupted him.

"You don't, eh?" Marcus asked. "Look at this." He pulled a paper from his pocket and held it out. "The daily production record of key items that is put on my desk each morning. Do you see what it says? Yesterday, in all the world, there was produced exactly forty-seven pounds of steel. Pounds, mind you. Not mega-tons or even kilo-tons, but pounds! That is the data that the Computer gave me this morning. I've had technicians question over my printer; I thought it was in error. I've had Lemark send me over his own report. It was only this morning that I found that his printer was saying the same thing, and that he was faking up the sheets that he was sending me. It is not the printer that is in error, but the Computer; this is the data that it gives, and it is wrong!

"Do you know what this means? Or are you so engrossed in your own small problems that you cannot think? I tell you that without true data the world will be in chaos in a matter of weeks, maybe less. We cannot live without the Computer, even as you could not live

without your nervous system. We could not in the old days; there was war and famine and dissolution.

"Now we are organized, far more highly organized than we ever were before. And, too, we have forgotten how to operate without this tool, even so far as we ever knew. Without the Computer, there can not now be any hope of the survival of our civilization.

"Mr. Vane, this is a *very* serious matter." The director's eyes were hard and tight, and there was a whiplash in his voice.

"Yes, sir, I see, sir. I . . . I'm happy you will take over, sir." Vane was flustered and could not seem to find his balance. "I had just started, sir. Mr. Reynolds came in just the minute before you did, sir; I had been questioning the others. They claim they do not know what the matter is, and . . . that they had been doing everything they could to find and fix it."

"Perhaps," the director agreed. "But I am aware of a strong coincidence, here. Mr. Reynolds comes to me with an idiot plea. I place him in your care, and immediately the Computer breaks down. Coincidence or purpose, Mr. Reynolds?"

PHILLIP, looking into those cold eyes, felt more afraid than he ever had in his life. But, drawing on his reserves of strength, he took a deep breath and answered: "Marcus, sir, I still believe you have an opportunity before you now that will not come again. I still hope you will take it and release the world for freedom. As to what is the matter with the Computer, I do not know, and I do not think *you* can find out. Coincidence? No, I do not think so. But what are you going to do about it?"

There was a moment's silence, before Marcus, in an almost gentle voice said: "There are ways of finding out, Mr. Reynolds. And I think I have demonstrated in the past my willingness to use those ways."

"Marcus, sir," Phillip answered, "I am aware of that. But consider. You do not have much time; you cannot stand for many days the loss of the Computer. Your directorship will fall into chaos if you do not find the answer fast.

"And consider further: I may or may not have the answer. So may or may not each of these others here. Which of us will you question? This is an important point, and you should study it well, for your methods of obtaining the truth are rough; they depend on drugs or torture. And your methods are so rough that if a person *really* does

not know the answer—why, he will give you an answer, anyway. How will you know if the answer you get is the right one?"

"If it is the right one it will work," Marcus said.

Phillip nodded. "That's true; but if it's the wrong one, its trial may do incalculable and irreparable harm. Myself, for instance. Any answer you get from me will be in the form of a coded sequence for the master control board. The code for that board is nowhere written down; I have always considered it too dangerous to write down. And how are you to know that I have not given you the sequence that wipes out all of the Computer's memories?"

"If you asked the question wrongly, that might be a good answer; at least it would prevent the Computer from giving wrong answers. But, once done, it could not then be undone; it would take five years to get the Computer back even to where it is now. Could you take that risk? Would you dare to try out any answer I might give you?"

"If I was sure I had the right person, yes." The director's voice was cold and flat.

"That is exactly the question," Phillip said; "but how can you know?" He dared to smile.

"I have a way." Marcus also smiled. "I shall ask Rance."

There was a movement of surprise in all the Computer people. Dirk spun to look at the fat man, his face darkening with understanding and with anger. "So you're a spy." He spat out the words.

The fat man heaved a sigh. "Yes, I am a spy. Matter of fact, I'm his brother." He nodded at Marcus. "Probably other spies here, but I'm Mark's." He waddled over to a chair and sat down. "Glad it's out in the open; now I can sit down." He sighed again, from comfort.

"Well?" Marcus barked. "What's the answer?"

RANCE SHRUGGED. "There isn't any. Everybody here is capable of it. They live and dream revolution, here; everybody—except maybe the spies, and they have to pretend. Phillip's in it, no doubt; he's acting from no visible surprise. But it's quite possible he doesn't know what's been done. In fact, if he did not do it, he probably doesn't know. Better way to do things: each man knows only what he has to know. The man you want is the man who actually sabotaged the machine. Could be anyone."

"I think you know," Marcus answered. "Or if you don't know, you could guess. And with your intuition, your guess would probably be right. What's your guess?"

"Won't tell you," Rance said, "because they're right; you're through. Supposing you do break this, find out what's wrong and fix it. Shall I tell you your future? Shall I prophesy just how long you'll last? It's not long.

"Right now you're at the top. But things are building up, and you'll end up in the gutter. Me, I'm a spy, yes. But I'm a spy for you, Mark, not for the directorship; and I'm telling you to be a hero."

"That's up to me to decide." Marcus' voice was tight. "Tell me what you think, or I'll tear you apart to get the answer."

Rance closed his eyes and was silent a moment. When he spoke, his voice was so low as to be almost inaudible. "I am your brother, Mark. I don't like your threatening me; if I thought you meant it, I'd be your enemy. Don't try to prove it to me, because I think I'd be a dangerous enemy for you. You're through Mark; you're through, regardless of what happens here. The only option you have is how to take it."

The aura of tension in the room was oppressive; Rance's fat, full face, with the eyes still closed, seemed carved from icy rock. Marcus, his face betraying no emotion, but masklike and impervious, was still and brooding. Selma's eyes were wide, and her motions were jerky as she looked from one to the other. Dirk looked pleased as if there were deep laughter inside him at the drama of this scene. The others, each to his temperament and understanding, were fixed in fear or surprise.

Phillip Reynolds felt quite calm, and yet he knew he would not ever remember with any clarity what had happened here; it would seem like a dream, uncertainly recalled. But he was pleased to note that his voice was normal as he asked: "Marcus, sir, which will it be? Will you force chaos, or will you accept the opportunity to be the savior of mankind?"

Phillip's words seemed to break the spell. The director smiled slightly. "Mr. Vane," he asked, "do you concede now that this is an affair somewhat beyond your authority?"

He stood up, not waiting for an answer, and turned to Phillip. "It is your hand, I believe, Mr. Reynolds. I fear you hold all the cards." He smiled a bit more widely. "But the game is still interesting. My friends and staff members will not approve; if they find out, I will not live to become your hero. The challenge of that circumstance is interesting. And afterwards...afterwards there will be still further

trouble. They will not easily give up the power that they have; I fear that they will have to die."

He walked to the door, and then turned once more. "So that I may live until the Anniversary Celebration, you will all remain within this building. Even you, Rance; and you, Mr. Vane; and your men; and those of my men who are in this room. My other men will guard the door, and they will have orders to kill. Afterwards, when the die is cast, then I will need Mr. Vane; I think he will work for me because he has a good nose for a winning side. And. . . I have no doubt that I will win. You are undoubtedly correct that the tide of history is moving."

His eyes were still cold as they swept around the room. "I will expect the Computer to be corrected at a very early time." He turned and walked out.

IT WAS RANCE who first moved. He heaved himself to his feet and waddled toward the door. "I will leave when I can," he said. "It is too bad, too, because I have liked it here; but the old order passeth." He went out.

Vane and the other policemen, and the men of Marcus' guard, followed him out; they walked as if in a state of shock, not yet comprehending what had happened.

Henry Cortson, Ralph Martin, and Jim Coster also drifted out, looking stunned but happy. They would drift into the lounge, Phillip thought, to talk it over, trying to make sense out of it all, and wondering what would happen. They would talk about it, he knew, and then gradually drift into active planning; they were good fellows.

They were all good fellows, even Rance. The chap had been a spy ~~;~~ but still, it had been he who had told Phillip this was the time, not for plotting, but for a pure power play. And he had been right; it *had* been the time. The men around Marcus were beginning to jockey for position, each aiming at the pinnacle. Until now, they had been together, fearing the world; but now that they felt the directorship secure, they were beginning to maneuver to seize it for themselves. And Marcus knew this; he knew—though perhaps he had not admitted it to himself—that this would soon destroy his power, and that his days were numbered closely.

And then, too, this was the psychological time. Marcus had conquered the world; the only thing that was left for him to do was to

conquer the hearts of men. He could only do that by such an act as they had forced him into.

But whatever the reason, events had proven this was in fact the time to strike. The die had been cast; Phillip had won his bet. And it was Rance who, at the end, had called the score and made the director see it. Phillip would die, he supposed, still wondering what manner of man Rance was.

THERE WAS only Selma and Dirk left in the room with Phillip. He looked at them, smiling, wondering what to say that would not be anticlimax. But the girl saved him the problem. "Oh, Phillip," she said, "that was wonderful." And on sudden impulse she bounded over to him and kissed him soundly.

"It certainly was," Dirk chimed in. "Got to hand it to you."

Selma whirled on him. "What are you putting your two bits in for?" she asked. "You dessicated mechanic, you wouldn't lift a finger; in fact, you worked your fool head off trying to repair Matilda. You'd better go crawl into a vacuum tube."

Dirk stared at her. Then with a shrug, he went over to the control panel and his fingers began to fly over the buttons. Having put in the opening sequence, he moved to the typewriter and, apparently, rattled off a series of questions without even looking at the answers. After giving the closing sequence, he ripped out the paper from the other typewriter, glanced at it, nodded once, and tossed it on the table. Then he stalked out without saying anything at all.

Phillip picked it up and read what it said:

"Subject: Coding.

"Information received re steel. Coding number. Query.

"Reply query: 236/648/76.

"Information transmitted re steel. Coding number. Query.

"Reply query: 236/648/75.

"Material whose coding number for receipt of information is the same as that given in response 2nd query. Query.

"Reply 3rd query: Steroid No. 6742.

"End."

Phillip smiled. So that was the material of which only forty-seven pounds had been made the day before; he had wondered. But this was of no significance; what was of profound significance was that Dirk had, by his series of questions to the Computer, shown that he knew exactly what had been done to Matilda. For Phillip Reynolds had

simply instructed the Computer to code incoming data one unit higher than normal, and to use the normal code for all other operations. Hence, all the data received had been simply misfiled; and Dirk had known this.

Selma was starting to say something, but Phillip interrupted her. "You are a fool," he said, but his voice was kindly. "Dirk knew what he was doing; he is too good a computerman not to be able to figure out what had happened. This paper proves it. He did not find out what was wrong with Matilda quite simply because he took good care not to."

Selma stared at him with wide eyes. Then, with a little, wordless cry she turned around and darted out the door.

Reynolds laughed. The two of them together would make a good team, once they learned to understand each other. And this time, he thought, they probably would.

IT WAS SOME eight months later, when all the shooting and the speech-making were over and while the new democracy of the world was still trying to find its feet, that Phillip Reynolds sat down at the counter of a coffee shop where he had found his brother Peter. "Do you mind?" he asked.

Peter looked around at him and looked somewhat surprised, but not very much so. "Hello, Phillip," Peter said. "This is a public place; it does not matter whether I mind or not."

"It does to me," Phillip answered. "I was hoping we could be friends again. After all, the whole situation is changed; the directorship is gone. Marcus is retired, and no one knows where. His cohorts are dead or vanished. Your own group—that we used to call the Thorndike group—is now important in the new government of freedom. And I... I am an old man now; I have retired."

"The Computer is being run by Selma and Dirk, Mr. and Mrs. Richards—at least as much as it is run by any individuals. Matilda, which was the tool of Marcus, is now the tool of the New Democracy of the World; and it is just as effective a tool. Without it, your dreams and hopes would have gone for nothing, for the world is too complicated to be run by purely human hands. To make the wise and necessary decisions, far too much data must be integrated. Whether it be under a directorship, or the government of free men, Matilda is the tool to hold off chaos. Don't you understand?"

Peter put down his coffee cup and looked at him with deliberation.

"You have built a fine Computer, yes; I never said you didn't. But it takes more than that to make yourself a man.

"You hated Marcus and the things he did; if you had loved him and thought the things he did were right, then I'd have been puzzled, but I'd have conceded you the right to your opinion. But you didn't. You knew he was evil, and you just didn't have the guts to do anything about it; that I cannot forgive." He slid off the stool and turned to walk out.

Phillip opened his mouth to call him back. But what would he say? Tell the truth? He didn't dare; for if the world knew that it was the Computer which had been behind all, then they would never trust it. For Matilda had shown Phillip Reynolds the terrible necessity for Marcus' regime, simply by indicating the devastation and decline which would come unless a world directorship could rule long enough to organize the world. If they knew the power of Matilda, they would destroy her; they would not dare do otherwise.

And, too, if the truth should become known, then the myth that was Marcus would be destroyed. Marcus was now the shining idol, the man who had, with infinite skill and cleverness, forged the freedom of the world. And it was strange, but that myth was already a potent force—perhaps even the most powerful force—for the goal of a free and stable world. To destroy that image, false though it was, would be to undermine the very thing for which Phillip Reynolds had fought.

No, he could not speak; he could not say the words, tell the facts, that would make Peter know what he had done. And it was not important that he had done it partially for Peter, to save his brother from the penalty of what would have been an abortive revolution.

No, his lips were sealed. He and the others would have to live out their lives, satisfied with only their own knowledge of what they had done.

There was sadness in him as he watched his brother walk out of the coffee house.



INHERIT THE EARTH

by **MONROE SCHERE**

illustrated by **ORBAN**

WE CAME down through Earth's incredible clouds and at first we saw nothing but forest. At last we found the car—the lone, time-sagged car still perched on a broken bridge. As we hovered, we saw a human skeleton beneath the car's bubble-roof.



We had expected to find the car and the remains of its driver—previous expeditions had noted its latitude and longitude—yet it shocked us to visit our ancestor. How comfortably the bones lolled backward, how wisely the fleshless face leered upward at our ship!

"Their heads were so small," Phil whispered.

I said, "You mean *our* heads are so big."

"That's what I mean, that's what I mean. And look at the small ribcage, compared to ours. But the pelvis is massive..." His voice trailed off. We all know these differences rather well and rather grimly. He looked out and away across the mist-dimmed forest, across the river that rushed clean and pure beneath the broken bridge. "And this was their world. Water...water-power...tide-power. Coal they couldn't exhaust. They didn't need fission-energy..."

We on Mars know rather well and rather grimly the richness of the world we lost. I didn't dare let Phil get moody; so, with an elaborate groan, I laced my fingers across my abdomen. Like Phil, I was braced by a corset against the dreadful tug of Mother Earth. "They were a little too rich in gravity, for my taste!" I chuckled.

The skull, cherishing its own ancient jest, grinned up silently. We traveled on.

Earth is a bright star. Earth is the home of Man—read the microfilm and learn the wonderful stories, and the dreadful stories. Earth is a planet splashed with seas, humped with mountains, blanketed with trees, sunk inside of an enormous quantity of air.

Earth—look!—Earth is a tiny blue pond that reflects our ship. And here, beyond sunken rectangular patches that once may have been a city, Earth is a field of...get the ancient flower guide...Earth is a field of daisies.

But Man was great. Again the forest revealed—a huge paved landing-area heaved and cracked, transmission towers partly standing; a piece of monorail going from nowhere to nowhere; a thick dam crumbled at the top and backed by swamp. And finally one of those ghastly horizon-to-horizon swathes that the fission blasts burned lifeless and shiny during the A-Wars.

We knew, of course, it was not the A-Wars that ended Man's history on Earth. The A-Wars only reduced the Federation and the Khannate into scores of little Federations, Leagues, Khannates, Empires, Kingdoms and Anarchies...little blots of scienti-feudal government, each an enemy of every other...while the viruses increasingly blew and flew and insinuated. The final spasm we call the Virus Wars. The

viruses disappeared after four hundred years, but for Man that was much too late...

We traveled on. Everything we saw was strange; yet from the microfilms and micropics we had been educated to recognize all we saw. It was like living a nostalgic fairy tale.

WE HEADED southward along the Atlantic Coast of North America until we found warm and mineral-laden seas. We found a palm-fringed island that had a small, shallow, narrow, crooked bay, good for our purpose. Our hull crunched into a beach of coral sand.

Squinting through dark glasses, we feasted upon the sliding-yellow and luminous-green and shifting blue of the water. We looked hungrily at the little, hurrying trade-wind clouds; and the fuzzy-black area out there over the heaving, marvelous sea...that was a—rainstorm? One of those little ones they called a squall—how it raced beyond the creamy line of reefs, sweeping veils of rain into the greater water!

Moving heavily, we put on the survival-helmets that covered our entire heads. It was necessary to cool, rarify and somewhat de-oxygenize the air we breathed. We left the ship and stood uneasily on the beach, in the sticky heat of the swollen Sun. We saw crabs on the beach, and offshore a couple of pouch-beaked birds that flopped into the water and came up with fish. Of course, neither on land or sea did we discover any mammals; even the whales and the porpoises and their ilk had died of the viruses—along with the Master Mammal—long ago.

Extending our crane from the ship, we got a thin stress-barrier set across the bay's narrow mouth. Inside the stress-barrier we placed one terminal; we placed the other terminal at the landward end of the little bay. We laid cables from both terminals to the generators in our ship. I threw the switch.

§ In a moment, the shallow waters of that inlet began to froth away in vapor. It would take a very few minutes to empty the area we had dammed. Then, from the exposed inlet-floor we could scoop the sea-salts for which we had journeyed to Earth: sodium chloride, magnesium sulphate, calcium sulphate and all the rest.

Watching the edge of the water creep down the glistening beach, I still could ask—why? We had all these salts on Mars. But the expedition had been voted; our resources for three years had been channeled into hoarding and storing the ship's power. I, who am among the youngest of our twenty-two men and who am the nearest norm-sane, had been voted Skipper; young and strong—albeit unsteady—Phil had

been voted my assistant. We had our duty to perform; the survival of our race was at stake.

WE ON MARS, unable to re-make ourselves to live on the Earth of our ancestors, were going to experiment with terrestrial sea-salts as a buffer constituent of our blood. Thus, some of us supposed, we might restore our fertility and at least carry on the race of Man on Mars where it was exiled.

It was futile and most of us knew it. Man, drastically changed so he can live on Mars, simply is not a valid creature; intelligent but frustrate, he is virile but rarely fruitful; he is a freak and the cosmos does not want him. He sits amid his diminishing brothers and sisters, and imagines he hears the cries of children in the thin wail of the Martian wind. He gives up trying even for test-tube babies and he turns to a kind of mysticism:

We know that life on Earth began in the sea, then crawled out of the sea. Man evolved, still carrying the sea in his blood. On Mars, however changed, his blood still runs salt. Now, perhaps the sea-salts of Earth contain some unknown life-factor necessary to Man. Let us collect salts from the ancient womb of life, restore them to our vitiated blood, hope that somehow this restores our fertility. . .

Mumbo-jumbo.

Better if there never had been any diminishing trickle of grotesque children—like myself—born on Mars to read the history of Man. I am our most nearly norm-sane and I say that the history of Man is a book to be closed forever.

But our twenty-two men and eighteen women had voted; therefore, Phil and I must sit heavily and dizzily upon a beach of Mother Earth, waiting to collect sea-salts.

The waters of the bay slid down and down. Fish floated to the surface and lay belly-upward; exposed on the sand we saw sea-urchins, starfish, a writhing octopus. Out over the sea, on the shoulder of the squall, we saw that which is called a rainbow.

With a mazed mind I looked away from that arc of glorious color, that ancient symbol of hope. And my thoughts seemed to fly off into a fantastic, subjective allegory. Actually, as I looked into the diminishing waters of that beautiful little Earth-bay, I imagined I saw people running out of the water! I imagined I saw a naked man, a naked woman and a naked child—a perfect little family created by my subconscious wish—run out of the water. I imagined Man rising from the sea.

I looked away, blinking and sad. But my helmet communicator screamed, "Men! Skipper, look, men!" And Phil began to run clumsily, dropping his shell specimens.

A double hallucination? I checked him sharply. "Man—woman—child!" he babbled. And now I saw that the man, the woman and the child left footprints in the sand, and their long shadows slid beside them, and water dripped from them; and I had to believe they were real.

THEY RAN up close to me. They were the old, small-headed, true Earth type that we had thought extinct a hundred generations ago. But no—they had differences. They were hairless and they had bluish skins; their shoulders were abnormally sloped, and their bodies tended to suppress any external organs. They wore something. . . no, it was not any kind of garment, it was a ruff of convoluted tissue—gills!—that grew around each neck!

For a second they paused, staring at me. With a webbed hand, the man reached for a bone-pointed spear he carried in a woven seaweed sling across his back.

I owe my life to his being used to hunting underwater. He only thrust with the spear instead of throwing it, and not being used to judging distances in air he fell an inch short. He dropped the spear—I picked it up. They ran on. We were left staring at oily human buttocks that pumped with the effort of running on floppy webbed feet. The family disappeared into a fringe of sea-grape at the land edge of the beach.

I had to hold Phil. "See the child, see the child!" he babbled, trying to run after them. Finally we got our cables unplugged, entered the ship and dropped onto the tension-bubble couches. Perhaps I was as excited as Phil. We shouted like boys.

"They have weapons!"

"They know how to weave!"

"I saw earrings in the woman's ears—earrings!"

"They keep the family unit!"

"There must be more!"

As soon as I moved the ship inland above the palms, we saw our little family again. They were taking the shortest route to the sea, up and over a rocky spine that ran along the inlet. Immediately we saw that those gilled people were not adapted to land travel. Their sides heaved; they held their hands in agony to their chests, while the rough

stones drew blood from their clumsy feet. Apparently they were hardly able to breathe, yet they held their mouths closed; they did not gasp for breath. The man picked up the little girl, but he barely could carry her. And now they all did something that to us was ridiculous—they pinched their noses and held them pinched as they struggled up the rocky hill! Then the man fell. The woman helped him up. He could not carry the little girl, although she sagged to her knees. . .

"We'll land," I said swiftly. "We'll try to get them into the ship and take them to the sea. If they won't—"

PERHAPS we would have had to stun them. But suddenly the sky darkened and it rained. Trees thrashed about; lightning flickered and thundered; water came down in those torrents that mean rivers, ponds, cultivation, green life. . . torrents that have not fallen upon Mars in a billion years.

Through our streaming port we saw the water-living family revive almost instantly. The parents each held a hand so as to funnel more water onto the little girl's gills. With the other hand, they still held their noses; they made sure the little girl held her nose, too. So, as long as their gills were moist, they could breathe. But why must they keep air out of their noses?

Again they moved through the forest toward the sea. But the rain faltered, turned into a mist; the sun struck through; the mist rose and vanished. And again the man, the woman and the child showed their agony. They snatched handfuls of wet leaves which they wiped upon their gills. Thus they managed to reach the top of the ridge, where the sea lay below.

But now all the leaves had dried.

Within a few yards, the woman lost her footing. The man tried to help her; the child was caught between them and they all rolled down a stony slope and lay in a ravine. They lay unconscious, and now they gasped with open mouths and they did not hold their noses. Then the man revived a little. Weakly he reached for his nose. . . became aware of the child and the woman, let go of his nose and grabbed both of theirs while he shuddered as though in dreadful pain.

Then, undoubtedly, he thought it rained. But the water that fell upon them never was raised by the sun from Earth's mighty oceans, never appeared as clouds floating in Earth's thick air. It was water painstakingly scraped as ice from a paper-thin Martian polar cap, carried as our drinking water for 40,000,000 miles.

We had barely enough to revive them. Then we rushed the ship to the sea, at high speed scooped our tank and our cargo hold full of seawater, rushed back to the family and *rained* again. Holding their noses, they sat in mud, squinting up at the ship dazedly, while with a perforated plate I arranged a spreading, long-lasting shower.

I persuaded Phil to stand ready to drop a tension-wall to defend me if need be. I descended and stood at the edge of the spray. I had to take instant steps to show they could trust us; so I took with me that spear, that contrivance of driftwood and bone, and I dropped it before the man.

He picked it up, hesitated, returned it to his seaweed sling, staring at me, blinking weirdly. He had transparent, supplementary eyelids.

What now?

I took a deep breath and pulled my helmet off my head.

They saw the result of surgery and controlled mutation which at length had fixed the characteristics of a human race that could live on Mars. They saw a creature that might, perhaps, have evolved on Mars if humanoid life ever had evolved there. Did they recognize me as human? Eight feet tall, skinny-limbed, big-headed, balloon-chested, saucer-eyed, trumpet-eared. . .

I SAID ON one exhaled breath, "We are friends. We want to help you." I did not expect them to answer; I merely thought I should try the simplest form of communication first.

They looked at each other in wonder. If ever I doubted these were really humans, my doubt vanished when I saw their expressions of human wonder—the eye-ridge lifting, the jaw dropping, although they still held their noses and kept their mouths closed.

Then the man spoke. His speech, like mine, proceeded on a single outgoing breath. It was a resonant, slurred rumble—for so one would speak underwater. He showed tusk-like incisors.

"Do you live on 'a lan'?" he said.

I glanced up at the ship. Phil had the camera and the recording wire going. What to say? Did history ever wait so drastically on words? Should I draw a diagram of the sun and the planets, and indicate the fourth planet? Should I advance with hand outstretched and hail this man as my sunken brother?

Suddenly, out of a jumble of thought, my mind seized a hint. Seized truth, simple and amazing as truth can be. I looked up and said for the wire in case I should die: "Somebody solved it—how to stay alive

despite the viruses!" I got back into my helmet for a few safe breaths. Then, to the man with bleeding, webbed feet—"We live on the land!" Back into my helmet, out again. "The land is good!" I said.

"Poison!" said the Waterman.

"No—no more poison!" Hide, breathe, afraid of choking on Earth's air. "Breathe through your nose!" Hide. "The land is good!" Hide. "Live on the land, it is good!"

He shook his head. The little girl wept, clinging to her mother's thigh; the woman held her fiercely.

Breathe through your nose and live on the land! If I could make them believe it, Man would inherit the Earth again. In my helmet, I walked forward and into the shower that fell from the ship. I touched the man's hand that held his nose; it was warmer than mine. I pushed his hand insistently.

He let go of his nose for a moment. Pain crossed his face and he grabbed his nose again. "Hurts! Poison!" he said.

Water fell upon the lank hair and shrunken face of a Marsman. "The hurt will stop. Breathe through your nose. No poison—the poison has gone away!"

The woman cried out, "Back in 'a water, back in 'a water!"

I said with the last of my strength. "We must see you again. Tonight, in the dark?" I pointed shakily. "Near the water, there?"

The man's brow creased; his mouth tightened downward with worry. "I have t' ask 'a Chief."

Phil helped me back into the ship. We escorted the three beneath our shower till they walked into the sea.

The woman looked over her shoulder as she released her nose, just before she dived. Imagine an Earthwoman, bald, with ears like a seal's. The breasts are recessive, having been mutated almost into internal glands like any sea-mammal's. But the ears are pierced with bits of red coral; and the lips are beautifully shaped, a perfect Cupid's-bow.

UNTIL THE West Indian dusk, Phil and I rested in space where gravity is more kind. I had to take restoratives, but I was happy. How we laughed! How we derided that skeleton in his car, on the broken bridge!

For someone—possibly a minion of the Emperor of Darien, possibly a chained citizen who saluted the Caribbean Khan—had succeeded in making a Man who could live on Earth despite the viruses. A Man who could live and breathe underwater!

The scientists of the Lake League—they who built Earth's first and last space-ships in a sealed shed, and completed the ships while the mad, dying mob outside smashed its way in, and sent off the ships while hundreds clung to their hulls and died beyond the atmosphere—those scientists knew the viruses did not live in water. The shed drew its air from beneath Lake Superior through artificial gills.

And the microfilms tell of a group of surgeons and geneticists who wanted a thousand volunteers willing to be carved and irradiated, in an attempt to create a new race that might live amid the viruses. But there was no time; few volunteered; the Lake League kept the forms of personal liberty. Only later, on Mars, were more than four hundred of the six hundred picked seed-people carved and irradiated and killed before Marsman was created.

Meanwhile, in the American tropics, what scientists of what mad little kingdom of the dying, working in what sealed cave or submarine, killed how many prisoners to create a race with gills?

Perhaps those scientists had tried to make a race that would keep on being civilized beneath the water. But a return to savagery was inevitable. What they had done, and done well, was to implant in Waterman a fear of land-living, for the sake of his survival. Down through the generations the oldsters mumbled to the young, underwater—*The air of the land is poison death . . . never breathe through your mouth or your nose!*

Still, they who made Waterman had not sealed off his nose! They that knew the viruses eventually would vanish; they knew that in some age some Waterman would dare to try the forbidden breathing. He would survive, and gradually Man would come back out of the sea.

Thus we conjectured, resting in space. It must be so. All we did, that night, was to advance matters a few hundred, or few thousand, years.

When we could, Phil and I did a little work in our machine shop; then we returned to Earth. We scouted a stream where we flushed our tank and took on fresh water. We finished emptying the little bay and scooped a hold-full of those ridiculous salts.

We landed on the seashore in the light of a monstrous moon.

A WHILE WE waited, hoping, beginning to despair. Then, far out in the water, we saw them. They bobbed in and out, watching, drawing near, each head a splash of phosphorescent silver. One by one, and in families with glorious children—a couple of hundred Wa-

terfolk at least, and they were only one tribe—they swam into the slow-rolling breakers that crashed along the beach. They sat in a foot of water, where the waves broke over them from time to time, and held their noses. Some chewed fish.

I met the Chief at the edge of the water. He was an old man with a wasted body, one leg badly scarred, perhaps in some encounter with a shark. He carried one of those driftwood spears; but his spear was carved, and bits of mother-of-pearl had been pressed into the shaft.

Our motion pictures of the meeting, momentous as it was, always draw laughter. With every sentence I had to duck back into my helmet; every two or three minutes, the Chief—constantly holding his nose—retired to soak his gills.

In a little while, two other old men came up timidly. One of them was a kind of historian, or legend-teller. Bit by bit, I heard of a time when the floor of the ocean heaved, the water receded and stranded many of them. As a result of this earthquake, they learned it was possible to breathe in the air as long as the gills were wet. But it seems that some of their adventurers always had bobbed at the surface, holding their noses while they wondered at the clouds and the stars.

Later, they ventured a little way onto the land when gathering shell-fish. Apparently—this was hard to understand—after a few minutes of exposure to air their noses began to function and gave them considerable pain. They connected the pain with the ancient taboo against nose-breathing; but they were very curious about the land.

I urged them strongly to come onto the land and practise nose-breathing. I assured them the pain would go away. I told them the land was full of wonders, and afforded easy living. I said I had been sent from the sky to tell them—and I think they retained some notion of a god.

I gave them two light metal spears tipped with carbide. My attempt to throw a spear was ludicrous, but my bow and arrow drew their profound respect. Then I stuck the arrow into our model of a bird, pretended to eat the bird, assured them it was better than anything the sea could offer. I gave them four heavy knives, purposely made of plain steel, and explained they must be kept dry. I whittled.

I was afraid I could not master any primitive method of making fire, so I did not try.

I broke a coconut, picked and sliced a juicy mango, showed them these were edible while I ignored my swift cramps. I tried to convey

the notion of planting seeds; but it was a difficult concept. I believe, however, that somewhere on Earth wild wheat still grows, and some day that staff of civilization will be rediscovered.

"Now live on the land!" Hide in my mask. "The land is good, the poison went away." Hide. "The water is for animals." Hide. "The land is for Man."

I dragged myself, trembling, back to the ship, leaving I know not what legend for their ages.

NOW, IN THE gulf between Earth and Mars, we carry a hold-full of sea-salts that cannot and will not restore fertility to our freakish race. Still, they wait and hope and they will try, for *Survive* is the basic law for men and races.

And now, as to the unaided eye the red star becomes a disk, becomes a sphere, that half-mad Phil flings an insult into the face of the heavens.

Surely, he says, the water-living remnant of Man on earth is healthy and fertile. Cannot we of Mars mate fruitfully with Earthman and Earthwoman? There indeed, he shouts, may be the missing spark. Breed a fantastic race? Pure Earthman is only a memory, anyway.

I never have been so profoundly shocked. Let Man on Mars die clean, I say—die with some valor and dignity, die with his last vision that of resurgent Man on Earth. The book is closed, I plead; the course is run.

But no—Phil strides about the control room and mouths his madness. He insists that in three years a shipload of us can return to Earth; can meet Earthman on the land and be most heartily welcomed and completely trusted. Then we can take fertile, sturdy wives and husbands away in the ship to some gravitational field tolerable to both...or marry on Earth; and even if the original travelers died quickly there, the children might live. Soon the new breed will take over the terrestrial inheritance. Why leave it to ignorant, savage Watermen, who for millions of years might wear gills? Obviously *our* race or its descendants is the more fitting to restore Man's glory.

I beg him to stop. Nothing but the old power-urge, I say wearily. Nothing but the old Master Race concept, and this time particularly unclean. Close the book and, with good heart, say "The End".

Not Phil. He is industriously dictating to the wire all the arguments for our mating with the web-footed primitives who alone should inherit.

And as soon as we land on Mars, he will present his case at a meeting.

He will say, "I raise the issue." Therefore the issue must be debated. Therefore we will vote.

We are twenty-two men and eighteen women . . . half a dozen of each well beyond breeding age . . . but even so, I am afraid I know how they too will vote.

Survive.

Shall I destroy this; shall I plunge the ship into the Sun?

I have no right to do it; I have no right to judge the right. I . . .

What do you think, O hundred times great-great-grandfather? I yearn toward you now as you lie in your car on the broken bridge, fleshlessly and forever a grin at Earth's history.



We're All Blushing!

A number of readers have complimented us on the story, "And What Remains?", which appeared in our last issue. We felt quite good about this, until we received a phone call from Mr. Winston K. Marks' agent, Scott Meredith. It seemed that Mr. Marks was pleased at seeing his name on the cover and contents page, but that he had no recollection of having written any such story; in fact, he was sure he had *not* written it!

We checked the original mss. and found that no author's name appeared under the title; the identification was on the agent's folder in which the story had been sent to us. There, the name "Winston K. Marks" had been typed under the title of the story.

Now it became a little clearer; we'd enjoyed this story muchly, and marvelled at Mr. Marks' supposed versatility when we read it, for this tale, "And What Remains?" was quite reminiscent of another very fine author's general approach—Irvig Cox, Jr.

Research uncovered the fact that the story *was* the work of Mr. Cox.

So we're all blushing about this error, and beg authors' and readers' forgiveness. And will future indexers kindly see to it that the story is credited rightly?

Moral: *be sure that your name, or the name under which you want your story to appear, is typed under the title on page one of your original manuscript.* RWL

Twenty years ago, this item would have been presented to science-fiction readers as a story. But you know as well as I that it is not a story — it's a speculative essay in narrative form. And it may be the basis for quite a few stories in times to come!

VOYAGE TO NOWHERE

A Special Feature

by WALLACE WEST

PROFESSOR Kenneth Scott grabbed his companion's arm so convulsively that the astronomer's syntini slopped over. "Here she comes!"

"...And damn the paradoxes!" Dr. Erasmus Thompson answered as he reached calmly for the half-empty mixer. Refilling his glass, he raised it toward a contraption that was materializing on the physics lab floor. "A toast to time travel while we still *have* time."

The professor drank without taking his startled eyes from the machine. It was changing color as he watched. The plastic panels misted, whitened, thickened.

"What the blazes?" he asked as the room temperature took a nose-dive.

"Out of here, Ken. Quick!" Thompson snatched up the mixer and dashed for the door. Scott followed, his head turned to watch the met-

amorphosis. Already his time machine was coated with ice, and the lab temperature had dropped below freezing.

"That thing must be down near absolute zero," the astronomer marvelled when they were out on the campus. "It sucked up heat like a sponge; no human will ever ride that death trap."

"There's nothing wrong with my machine." The physicist leaned a bare shoulder against the nearest tree and stared at the cold stars. "It's the future that's a trap. There *is* no future. . . for this gutted, Godforsaken planet, anyway! Don't you see, Raz? I sent the gadget a year ahead and it found. . . nothing! Nothing but cold, empty space! What fools we mortals are about to be again!"

"So the science fictioners were correct," his friend said shakily. "Since no visitors come to earth from the future, there can be no time travel, *or* there can be no future. Hmm?" He ran tobacco-stained fingers through his brush of greying hair, drank like a man dying from thirst, hurled his empty glass against the wall and snarled: "I don't believe it!"

"You have to believe it. You checked my equations; you saw the machine return!"

"And *you* jumped at the first fool hypothesis I put into your head. I have more confidence than that in the human race, Ken. Men have had plenty of chances to destroy themselves since they climbed down from the trees. During the past century they've really worked at it, but they've never quite succeeded. The death wish is a recessive trait; the will to survive is dominant. There has to be another explanation for that ice."

"And if there isn't, we'll have to invent one." Ken straightened his shoulders, shivered as the spring wind hit them. "Where do we start?"

Erasmus paced the dew-covered lawn, dodging both *Keep Off the Grass* signs and occasional strolling student couples.

"How's this?" he said at last. "Your machine travels in time by pushing against the curvature of space, you've told me. But what makes you think that it *travels in space*? It's not a rocket ship."

"I don't get you."

"Since we can substitute for any factor in the $E=mc^2$ equation, and since space and time are merely aspects of the same thing, what happens if we substitute 't' for 'm'?"

"How stupid can a man get?" Life had begun to come back into the physicist's green eyes. "Of course! An object travelling in time *could* remain stationary in space!"

"Quite! Much as Absalom got his hair caught in the branch of that tree and dangled while his war horse dashed on."

"When the machine materialized a year in the future, it did so where the earth had been a year in its past, but which will be...was...is...empty space now...or then."

"And, when it returned, it brought the cold of space back with it, naturally."

"Naturally!" Ken's bony shoulders sagged once more. "So time travel shall forever remain as impractical as interstellar travel. Q.E.D."

"I wouldn't say that. Maybe you've hit on something bigger than you think—the only practical interstellar ship."

"Whaaat!" It was the physicist's turn to spill a drink. "(I'll have to mix more of these.) What do you mean, Raz?"

"We have, by this year of disgrace, 1995, managed to get ships out as far as Pluto," his friend answered grimly. "And there we have stuck. Why?"

"Lots of reasons: (a) Nobody wants to waste 20 years of his life or so jaunting out to Alpha Centauri and back, maybe. (b) Even if he were willing, there's not enough atomic fuel left to gamble it on an eight-light-year trip that might be a bust, and (c) If, by some miracle a crew and sufficient fuel could be rounded up, there are not enough real scientific brains available to build an interstellar ship. The trained seals are all working on the Pluto project; the rest of us are either wasting our lives in bankrupt jerkwater colleges or running filling stations because we are considered security risks."

"Go to the head of the class, Ken. Or rather, let's go back into the lab. These ersatz sneakers of mine leak dew like sieves. Next question: how much did you spend on the construction of your machine?"

"Peanuts." Ken opened the door and let the cold air pour out as a dense cloud of fog. "That is, all the money I can save after I hand over my monthly bribe to the Clearance Committee."

"What about power?"

"Fleapower... A few black market storage batteries." He sat down on a metal chair behind the frosted console, came to his feet with a yelp and hurried about the room switching on radiators. "But, Raz, what's the good of sending it out to Nowhere and back?"

"Why not send it to Somewhere?"

KEN PUT syn and vermouth into the mixer, added bits of ice chipped from the machine, swirled gently and waited.

"Today," the astronomer continued, "I finished going over the results of a study that Dr. C. D. Shane, then director of Lick Observatory, started back in 1947 to determine the speed of rotation of the galaxy. Shane and his successors were determined cusses. Despite the dislocations caused by World War 111, the dust storms, and the War with Mars, they kept right on taking thousands of photographs of the galaxy over the years. Now the set is complete and the computers have analyzed them. We know, within a very small margin of error, that the galactic wheel is turning clockwise, as seen from its north pole, at 211.6758 miles per second. We also have nailed down the random motions of most of the nearby stars."

"I don't get it," Ken confessed. "Sounds like trying to determine the speed of a convoy by taking photos from one of the ships."

"Shane included lighthouses in his photos. That is, he used extragalactic nebulae as reference points. They're so far away that their apparent position has changed very little since 1947, even though the universe is now known to be expanding at very close to 25,000 miles per second."

"So?" Ken tried to open the door in his machine. His hand jerked back involuntarily and he sucked frostbitten fingers.

"So, stupid..." Erasmus was, as usual, getting belligerent from the synthetic alcohol, "all we have to do is to determine, through a study of Shane's figures, when—in the past or the future—another star came, or will come, close to the position in space that our sun now occupies."

"We'll build a larger edition of your time gadget around an interplanetary ship. We'll snap said ship backward or forward. We'll chug over to the star. If it has unoccupied earth-type planets, we'll have outlets for our surplus population. If they are occupied by intelligent races we may be able to buy metals and other raw materials that we have run so short of. Then we reverse the machine and come home. '*See Space on a Shoestring*' will be our motto. Simple, isn't it?"

"Don't give me space warps, when it's time warps that I need. When do we start?"

"Not so fast. This will cost more than peanuts; we'll have to sell the idea to New Washington."

"Isn't there some other way?" the younger man groaned.

"Not unless you marry an heiress. Poor old Witherspoon U., hasn't the money to finance a new doghouse since its last government project folded."

"Do you know anybody who knows anybody down at New Washington?"

"Let me see?" Erasmus pulled at his long nose. "There was a girl I used to date when I was stationed there during the Martian war. A good egg. Married some United Stars bigwig later. Name began with an 'S'. Schultzie! That's it! WAC Sergeant Schultz.

"I could try to locate her; but first, I should locate some stars to visit. Probably take me a week or two if the computer cranks can work my questions into their schedule. Hmm! Move the machine a hundred years either way and earth will travel a distance of... something like thirteen light years, figuring its speed at 25,200 or so miles per second." He yawned. "How many syntinis have we had? My head's full of feathers."

"Too many!" Ken matched him. "We'll have to cut down, even if we do die from sheer boredom. Let's knock off now; we have all the time in the... universe."

"Maybe." The astronomer tweaked his glowing nose again. "But there must be a bug in it. If interstellar travel is so easy, how come the BEMS from Sirius or Alpha Centauri haven't dropped in on us long before this?"

GETTING an appropriation out of United Stars proved just as difficult as Ken had anticipated, even with "Schultzie's" warmhearted intervention. Over the course of six weeks there was endless correspondence in vari-colored quintuplicate. Eventually an "expert" did come to Witherspoon. He had one drink while the two professors had many. He watched a demonstration of the machine, and departed.

Another month and the Olympian decision was handed down: in view of the depleted state of the U. S. Treasury; in view of the further fact that all interplanetary ships were urgently needed for runs to the reclamation project on Pluto; in view of the final fact that no concrete proof had been given that the Scott-Thompson Project actually could be used for space travel, it had been given a D-3X rating. Sorry. Maybe later... (The inventors did not know that the "X" in the rating branded them as irresponsible alcoholics.)

"To quote old Qmar," sighed Erasmus when they received the news, "*Turn down an empty glass*." He suited action to word.

"Maybe not." Ken stared grimly at their rejected handiwork. "Do you have any money?"

"A little," his friend hedged. "There's nothing much left to buy except syn."

"It shouldn't cost too much to insulate and pressurize this thing..."

"I've got a better idea." The astronomer jumped to his feet. "Remember that old bathysphere Professor Jordan used when 'Stars had a brainstorm and asked Witherspoon to investigate the possibilities of growing food-on the ocean floor? It's gathering dust out in one of the barns. Why not...?"

"Why not, indeed!" Ken scooped up the mixer and headed for the lab door.

ANOTHER month later two flat-broke and badly hung-over educators crouched inside the padded steel sphere meant for the exploration of ocean deeps and drank to Operation Time Warp. Then Ken reached for the verniers on the transplanted console with hands that trembled ever so slightly.

"Just a little hop this time," he said softly. "Far enough to get the solar system out of our hair and take some pictures, huh?"

"The littler the better." White-faced under his studied nonchalance, Erasmus put a plate into the camera he had borrowed from the school observatory. "Since there's no heat convection or conduction in space we should stay fairly comfortable in this coffin for quite a while. Nevertheless..."

Ken snapped a toggle. Without the slightest wrench or time-lapse, they were staring down, through the sphere's thick plate glass window, at the sun and its whirling planets.

"Somewhere out beyond the orbit of Neptune," the astronomer chortled.

"Nothing to it," said his friend. But the rim of his glass rattled against his teeth when he drained it. "Say when."

Erasmus worked like a madman, exposing plate after plate.

"When," he said at last.

Ken reversed the circuits. And they were back in the Witherspoon barn!

"Well!" They looked at each other with a let-down, unsatisfied feeling.

"How about one more?" Ken wheedled. "We've got plenty of time before dinner."

"Well... O.K., if that's all there is to it. Like taking a subway. Let's try two years this time... Knock New Washington's eyes out with our pix."

"Past or future?"

Erasmus took a coin from the pocket of his shorts. "Heads for the future," he grinned as he tossed it.

It came up tails. Ken made adjustments, pressed the switch and sat back comfortably. Instants later he was in furious motion. Temperature inside the sphere soared; the window glared like a furnace mouth.

"What happened?" he gulped when they were safely back in the barn.

"We came within an ace of falling into some star." The astronomer fanned himself. "You must be drunk. How far did you send us?"

"Two years. Honest, Raz."

"Doesn't make sense. We couldn't possibly have travelled more than one fourth of a light year in that time, and there's no fixed star that close. You must have hit the wrong button."

"I did not!" Ken opened the painfully hot port and climbed out to look for damage. None was apparent.

"Then you miscalibrated your instruments." Erasmus followed his friend, found a syn bottle that they had left outside, upended it, let the reassuring liquid gurgle down, and shuddered at its faint taste of kerosene.

Ken did likewise and turned stubborn with Dutch courage.

"Did not! I'd stake my life on their accurashy."

"You would, huh?" The astronomer climbed back into the sphere. "Aw right, then. Stake it! Le's make 'nother little trip right now."

"I should check everything over first." Common sense fought a losing battle with alcohol.

"So you admit you miscalibrated?"

"I do not!"

"Come on in here, then."

"Nuh uh." Ken still hesitated despite his rising anger.

"Wazza matter? You chicken?"

"O.K. O.K.!" He scrambled back to his place at the console. "We'll shoot th' works. Thousand years into th' future. Now who's chicken?"

"Not I!" Erasmus made a large, meaningless gesture with the bottle.

Ken set the dials with extreme care and slammed the power switch home.

"Now you've done it," groaned the astronomer. He was staring out of a window through which glowed not a single speck of light. "Where have you put us this time? Inside a cow?"

KEN LOOKED from the window to his instruments, suddenly cold sober. "This is crazy," he muttered. "Since we reversed our direction we should have gone around the rim of the galaxy to a point about 132 light years from earth. *But there's no galaxy in sight!* Not even a single dinky little star."

"Let me see those coordinates." Erasmus squinted at the long table of figures he had prepared. "Absolutely nothing wrong," he said finally with a shiver. "Sun's random motion, galactic rotation, universe expansion... all taken into account. Well, let's head for home; it's getting damned cold in here. I'll have plenty of time to double-check tomorrow."

"You and your infallible computers!" Ken jabbed viciously at a switch marked *The Present*.

He jabbed again. The velvety, crushing blackness wouldn't go away. "Lights in the barn must have burned out." He started to unscrew the port.

"Don't do that!" Erasmus' words were a shriek. "There's nothing *out there!*"

"Meemies, huh?" jeered his friend. But he stood away from the port handle.

"There's a factor I overlooked," the astronomer babbled. "Time must be curved, too; just like space."

"So time is curved. So why rave about it?"

"A thin rubber blanket!" The astronomer's face was as white as the night was black. "Stretched tight. Stars and galaxies resting on it like marbles; sinking into it a little; curving it with their weight! That's the way Einstein pictured a space-time continuum. So, if you pass near a star, light—and your ship—starts sliding toward it down the curve; that's what must have happened when you almost cooked us a while ago."

"I almost cooked us!" Ken doubled his big fists, then let them fall loose. "But we got back that time."

"Sure we did. When we headed into the past, we didn't merely go a short distance around the circumference of a circle, the way I thought we would. Some force swung us right into, or even through, the hub of the galaxy. Of course there's tremendous mass and curvature *there* for the machine to push against."

"What's the matter now?"

"By going a longer distance in the opposite direction we've got ourselves hurled off the rim of the galaxy *and* the universe, like a pebble

shot from a sling. There's no matter out here, Ken; no curvature; nothing to push on."

"How about pushing on this herd of pink elephants?"

"Don't joke. I'm sober." Erasmus held out shaking hands to prove it. "Look. Everything is in relative motion. Earth around sun; sun around the galactic center; all the galaxies, probably, around some unknown hub of the universe—each motion faster than the one before it. So why shouldn't the universe itself move?"

"Move in reference to what?" the physicist blinked.

"Lord only knows. We don't have Shane's nebular lighthouses. Maybe all the stars whizz along like electrons in a vacuum tube." Erasmus pounded his palms against his forehead. "At the speed of light. No! Light speed may not be a limiting factor. Perhaps at hundreds or thousands of times the speed of light! Don't you see, boy? Don't you see? In the millenium our sphere has remained in stasis the whole universe has shot past us, *backward*, and vanished. Now we must wait here until it catches up."

He leaned across the console and sobbed.

Ken made a few tentative adjustments on the instruments. He pushed buttons and switches at random. He stared at the window. It had frosted white. Good, he thought idly; the rime hid that awful dark. Why couldn't there be one star in sight...just one friendly, beckoning spark? He sighed and stepped up the heaters to their limit.

Reflexively he filled the mixer almost to its top with syn, added a whisper of vermouth and bits of ice scraped from the window. He swirled with loving care.

"Time for a drink, Raz." His words made puffs of vapor in the chilling room. "Time for two, maybe. Time, even, to write a note telling us to go on the water wagon so we'll avoid repeating this dumb stunt. Plenty of time."





THE TWO SHARP EDGES

*"We left when the war came; we went back
to my father's birthplace. But when we went
back, we had to go in a spaceship."*

by ALGIS BUDRYS

THE HILLS to which Henry Walters came in the Spring of 1965 were not like the gentle flatness of the land on which he had been born; the bite of the air was deeper than that to which he was accustomed, for this time of year. But he could feel the country—understand its mood and the reasons why the people who had lived in it had put their marks upon it as they had. The farmhouses and buildings were not in familiar, but in understandable shapes, and he knew the run of a furrow that takes the most growing room from a swelling hillside.

In the Spring of 1965, any man so fortunate was as close to home as he was free to hope. Henry Walters turned his worn old car down the narrow road to the village in the valley, found the local representative

of the Office of Resettlement and Rehabilitation, and bought a farm with the land-credits in his mustering-out paybook. And for a year, through the needling Summer's heat, the smoky Fall and hearth-warmed Winter, Henry was perhaps closer to home than even R&R's envisioners had ever aspired.

IT WAS ANOTHER Spring, and the fields above the farmhouse were deep in twilight green. From where he was standing on the slope, Henry looked down on the red and dark purple-blue sky reflected on the pond in the hollow of the hill, and his thinning hair stirred to the breeze that rolled down the hillside and broke the pond's surface into a hundred thousand polychrome refractions.

A year had been enough to bring the untenanted land back from the blurring that years had brought to its face. Alone, he worked through daylight into night, the cough of his tractor's engine echoing back from the hills; and while the furrows stretched themselves into the soil, and the fences squared their sagging shoulders, he learned every lesson the farm could teach him. And now that the cycle had begun once more; each blade of grass was an old friend, come home from the Winter. Once again, the land was given life, and gave life in return.

The strangers drove into his yard, four of them, and got out of the car, standing in the uncertain tight group of unannounced trespassers on another man's property while they looked for him.

Henry walked down the hill toward them. They saw him before long, but did not wave or shout needless greetings at him. He might have stopped and waited for them to come to him, if they had acted impatient, but they stood quietly together, with their faces turned up at him as he came down the hill; and even while he was some distance away from them, there seemed to be a sort of gentle defensiveness about the four men.

Three of them were about the same age, all in their middle twenties. The fourth seemed to be as much again older than they. They were part of the same family, dark-eyed, and as thin as Henry himself; but even the three younger men had heavy tracks of silver through the dark hair along the sides of their heads. As he came up to them, he saw the indecision at their mouths and the uncertainty of their looks. He noticed, too, that their clothes were a little old-fashioned—prewar—but must have been kept carefully stored somewhere, for, even allowing for the superiority of material, they were remarkably little worn. Their car was a prewar model as well, just as most were, but someone had given it far better than average care.

"Good evening," Henry said.

The older man seemed to regard it almost as a direct observation, for he took a deep breath of the twilight breeze and let his glance touch the sky and fields.

"Good evening," he answered. He held out his hand. "My name is Harold Piper. These are my sons; David, Charles, and Edward. You are Mr. Walters?" The diffident, slightly-embarrassed strain was in his voice, as well.

Each of the sons had nodded to his name, and Henry answered in kind. He shook Harold Piper's hand. "I'm Henry Walters. Pleased to meet you and your sons, Mr. Piper."

"I ought to explain," Piper said haltingly. "You see, this used to be my farm, before the war." His glance was on the fields again.

He looked back at Henry suddenly, as though guilty of theft. "We're not here to take it back," he said quickly. Henry twinged in inward sympathy at the hastiness of the man's explanation. It was a hard situation for a man to be in. He felt far from comfortable himself, and a selfish part of him wished that the man hadn't come. He could think of nothing to say in answer, and stood silently, waiting for Piper to go on.

"My wife and I and the boys left, when the war started. That made it public land." He looked at Henry's shirt, which might have simply been a garment bought in a surplus store, but wasn't. "You stayed, and whatever you did, you earned it." He looked up at the orchard, which Henry had carefully pruned and sprayed. "We inquired, down at the Rehabilitation office; they said you've only been here a year."

Henry nodded. "That's right. Just about an even year." He wished he could think of something more to say, instead of standing here awkwardly in the yard, watching Piper struggle with his own words.

"You've taken good care of it," Piper said, becoming more and more obviously embarrassed.

"Look," Henry said, pushing the words out hastily, not sure if he was doing the right thing or not, "would you like to come inside for a while? I'm alone up here, but I can offer you something to drink, and a bite to eat."

THE OFFER seemed to embarrass Piper even more. His hands moved nervously over his coat pockets, fumbling at their contents until one of his sons reached forward, apologizing uncomfortably as his arm came between Piper and Henry, and gave his father a cigaret. Piper lit it after a number of ineffectual attempts with the lever of his lighter, and puffed rapidly and jerkily before he answered.

"Thank you. Thanks—that's very kind of you. But we ought to be on our way; we just drove up for a look at the place. You know how it is." He swept his guilty eyes over the land again. "We—we've got relatives in—" He stopped and looked at his sons, his eyes demanding support. "—New Haven. In New Haven." He stopped, and he and his sons shared the same uncomfortable look.

Henry took a deep breath, and was glad the twilight was at least deep enough to let him hope the pity in his eyes was shadowed. "Mr. Piper, excuse me, but I don't think you're going anywhere. I don't think you've got any relatives in New Haven. I don't think you've *got* anywhere to go, and I wish you'd at least stay and have something to eat."

He watched the truth reflect itself on the faces of the four men, and he hated what he'd done to their pride; but pride wasn't the most important thing any more—not in 1966—and a drink and a meal offered with an open hand were at least a sign to a man that he wasn't unwelcome everywhere.

Piper sighed. He gave up the struggle with his features, and his face, stripped of its mask, was somehow more serene and self-contained. "You're quite right, Mr. Walters," he said, the sigh still strong in his voice. He looked at his sons. "We'll stay, boys."

Henry looked at the three sons, and at their father. Something crawled through the short hair at the back of his neck. DP's shouldn't be speaking perfect American; they shouldn't be dressed in American clothes, and have American names. They weren't supposed to come to you, the usurper, and stand humiliated on land which had once been theirs, with a phantom woman, a wife and mother, who had left with them but had not returned save in the far corners of their hurt faces. Henry knew there was nothing he was expected to do. This land was his, now; and he himself had a lost home, and his own phantoms.

"Good. Let's get inside, then," he said hoarsely.

THEY ATE silently, sitting around the kitchen table. Henry had done the best he could with a pair of chickens and what he had in the springhouse, and he'd brought out the half-bottle of Four Roses he'd picked up on the outskirts of New York. But they ate without speaking, and Henry was glad of it.

He watched the Pipers slowly relax. Their movements lost their constrained stiffness, and their heads slowly rose from their first

deliberate concentration on their plates. Henry could feel his own thinking un-knot in response.

There wasn't anything he or the Pipers could do. The land was his; the government had given it to him in compensation for the years of war. The Pipers had abandoned it, and had no claim on it. It was a tough break for them, but it wasn't Henry's fault. This was his home, now, but if he'd had things the way he'd have liked them, the Pipers would still be here, all five of them, and he'd never have left New Jersey.

What he was saying, he realized, was that if he'd had things the way he wanted them, there wouldn't have been any war. That was all the Pipers were saying, too, with their wounded faces.

Finally, the last plate was pushed back, and Henry gathered up the dirty dishes hastily, wishing that nobody would say anything, hoping that when he turned around from the sink he would find the Pipers silently gone.

He turned around, and Harold Piper said, "That was a very good meal, Mr. Walters. Thanks you."

"Wasn't much," Henry answered. He was so preoccupied with his thoughts that he went on automatically. "The cooking really needs a woman's touch—"

He stood there stupidly, his mouth helpless and agape, his eyes remorselessly showing him the faces of the four Pipers. He took a deep breath finally, his face pale. "I'm sorry," he said. "Didn't think."

Piper smiled gently, his eyes dark but his face composed. "No, Mr. Walters," he said, his voice steadier than Henry expected, "There's nothing for you to be sorry about. You're quite right. Any home needs a woman. Yours lacks one, and there is nothing more natural for you than to mention the fact." Something—but only the barest, most carefully controlled shadow of something—passed across his features and accentuated the darkness in his eyes. "Any other connotation is... irrelevant. A man should not go through life continually watching out for every stranger's toes. It makes for an erratic path."

Somehow, Henry's obvious embarrassment had put him on an even level with the Pipers. He felt the change in the atmosphere clearly, and was glad it had come, finally ending the intolerable strain. But he did not know exactly what to say in reply to Piper's last statement, and he felt his hands twitch ineffectually.

Piper was getting up, his sons rising with him. "You've been very kind. It has been an awkward situation, through no fault of yours."

The iron control, which only the first impact of their return to the occupied farm could have broken as much as it had, kept Piper's face and voice locked in calmness. "Thank you for your hospitality; we'll be going."

HENRY LOOKED at the four men. The father's mask was mirrored by his sons. There was no hint on the worn faces that nothing waited for them but the unknown, and homelessness. And he remembered, sharply, that from the very first there had not been the slightest gesture or action on any of their parts to indicate that they were not on someone else's property. Even before they had seen him on the hillside, or known he was watching them, they had remembered that the farm was his, now, and that his courtesy was all that gave them any right to be here.

"Wait—look," he blurted. "You don't have to go yet. It's night; you haven't got any place to stay, and you know you won't find one. There's room for you here." He almost added, "You know that," and stopped himself barely in time.

The pride rose in Piper's expression. "Thank you. That's very generous of you, but—" He looked at his sons again, in the same way that he had when Henry offered them supper. His shoulders rose and fell in a helpless shrug.

"You're right again, Mr. Walters; it is the only logical thing to do." He sighed and smiled wanly. "Logic is sometimes a difficult saddle to wear," he said gently. "But if one is a horse. . ."

It was a strange proverb, Henry thought. He wondered if Piper had just thought of it, or whether there actually was such a saying. "You're welcome to stay," he said redundantly.

"I know we are, Mr. Walters," Piper said with the same gentleness. He stopped, and suddenly looked deep into Henry's eyes. "You are a very rare kind of man."

Again, Henry did not know what to say. Piper was smiling at him, but he could not even smile in return.

"I'll find some quilts for you. It's still cold, at night," he said. He felt the heat seep into his face at the gratuitousness of that last sentence, and left the kitchen hastily. He went up the stairs to the bedding closet, his face still warm. There were so many things to be careful of, in dealing with the Pipers; the most casual statements precipitated him into new traps of thoughtless offense.

He remembered what Piper had said about being over-careful of

other people's sensibilities. The older man had been right, of course—for, among strangers, a man's toes were unwittingly trod on as often as he himself was liable to injure another. But the Pipers had themselves been painfully diffident.

Once again, one part of him wished that the Pipers had never come, and that, once here, they would be tracelessly gone in the morning. That part of him tried to persuade itself that the tactful Pipers would do exactly that.

But, already, another part of him was preparing itself for the following day, when he would have to stand on the hill and watch them back the car around in the cramped yard and roll down the hill—back the way they had come today, and the way they had gone that first, cold time, years ago.

THE NIGHT below the porch was full of bullfrog-song from the pond, which glinted faintly under the starlight. The night wind cut through the shrubs around the porch, and added its whisper.

Henry sat quietly in his chair, his field jacket shutting out the cold, a dead pipe in his teeth. His mind was blank—carefully blank. He had sat on this porch many nights in the past year, listening and learning, as the wind swept over the hills and the bullfrogs sang. At one time of the year, the wind was steady—blowing against the rain that waited over the mountains. At another time, the rain surged over the barrier; and then Henry listened to the sound of the brook that fed the pond, discovering how the water drained, what gullies it wore in the soil. He had lost part of a crop last year, because he did not know what the rain would do. He had learned, and this year there would be no loss.

He did not know where he had been given the patience to sit so, and learn. His father had had it, and he suspected that his grandfather had passed it on. That patience made him a farmer, for Nature could be understood; but she took a full four seasons to the year, and a man had to gear himself to the pace.

The Pipers had been good farmers, too. He had seen the signs, even through the blur that five years had dragged across their work. He knew, as he sat there, that Harold Piper had spent his hours on this porch; listening, learning, planning—and dreaming.

He was hardly surprised when he heard the porch door open, and Piper coughed apologetically. "Mr. Walters?"

The night had given him calmness. "Come on out, Mr. Piper; you're welcome to a seat." But he was not sure of how stable his calm would have been if he were able to see the other man.

He heard him settle his weight into another chair. "Thank you." Then there was silence again, though several times Henry heard the sharp inhalation that a man makes when he starts to speak and changes his mind.

Finally, Piper said, "Mr. Walters, I'd like to tell you something."

Henry frowned in the darkness, once again straining all his perceptions in an attempt to interpret the nuances of Piper's voice. There had been urgency, and fear of rebuff, and something else, as well. He could not penetrate that other, peculiar, quality. "Be glad to listen, Mr. Piper," he said.

Piper was quiet again for a moment, as though almost changing his mind. But then he sighed, and began. "I hope you'll understand. I think you will."

He paused, and Henry heard him chuckle for the first time—a low, resigned sound, that was a signal of surrender and relief at the struggle's end. "I—my sons and I—are not what we seem. Very few people are, of course, but, with us, the subterfuge is deeper."

Henry kept his eyes on the dimly seen pond, and listened patiently while Piper hunted out his words.

"I told you we left, when the war began. We did; we went back to my father's birthplace. I was born here, on this farm, as my sons were—" Henry winced. "—but my father came here when he was a young man. 'Piper' is not our real family name; it is a direct translation our name from my father's language."

"Germany?" Henry asked. "My grandparents came from Dessau. On the Elbe."

"No, Mr. Walters, I'm sorry." He paused again, and then said something in a language whose consonants leaped from crest to crest on the broad undercurrent of its vowels. There was a constrained quality to his voice, and he stopped in a moment. "I'm afraid my American accent's very thick. They had trouble understanding me, when we went back. My sons don't speak it at all, except for what they've picked up. It's a hard language to learn, unless you're born to it."

"Mr. Walters," he said suddenly, "when we went back, we had to go in a spaceship."

THE SENTENCE hung in the night air, and Henry found that he had raised his head involuntarily, and was looking up at the stars.

1966, A.D. Up there, somewhere, two gutted space-stations still swung. The American one, they said, was slowly losing speed, spiraling

infinitesimally closer to the mother world, ready to break the web that held it to the sky. Someday, unless they got a rocket up and dismantled her, she'd spin into the ground and kill for the last time. But those stations were as far as man had gone.

One trembling step into the edge of the surf.

"Go on, Mr. Piper," Henry said. *Speak, seafarer.*

"You see," Piper went on as though unaware that his audience might not believe him anymore, "the people on my father's world knew that war was coming. Technically, we weren't citizens of theirs any longer, but we all had relatives back on my father's world, and I suppose there was a lot of moral pressure on them. They sent ships to take us back, covering this whole planet, and picking up as many of us as possible in the time they had."

"Nobody saw them, huh?" Henry said.

"No, Mr. Walters, nobody really did. It wasn't easy, but a spaceship's lifeboats can be camouflaged to look like aircraft without much trouble. After that, of course, there is the difficulty of evading the strict checking systems which are kept on scheduled flights; and some nations do not keep their skies as full of planes as others. But it was done, and most of us went. In some countries, only a few got by the travel restrictions that blocked their way to the rendezvous. Others didn't want to leave their homes; of course, there must have been a number who had forgotten where the old, long-unused landing places were, or who didn't care. After all, the greatest percentage of us were second generation citizens of our countries, and most of us had children."

Henry's breath caught in his throat for an instant. "Excuse me, Mr. Piper. That doesn't sound much like you people were any too well organized."

"What's your nationality, Mr. Walters?" Piper asked quietly.

"American. Uh—I see what you mean. I'm no more a German than you're a— It isn't Mars or Venus, is it?"

"No, Mr. Walters, it isn't; and I'm an American." The point was important to him, and he stressed it. "By birth. Racially, my people come from a world around a star pretty much like this one, not too far away." The embarrassment returned to his voice. "I'm sorry, but I don't think I'd better say which one." His voice grew sad, now.

"That world is older than yours, Mr. Walters, and it was never so fortunate in its natural riches. By my father's time, it was too late for conservation, for birth control, or hydroponics. It is always too late,

for any world. One cannot be a miser, Mr. Walters, and still find time to push a civilization a little farther upward; a world cannot turn its energies inward, it cannot blunt the fine edge of its peoples' drive.

"A world is a spore pod. At first it is green, swelling with life. Then it dries up—but the pod bursts, and the spores go drifting out, and find fresh soil in which to grow."

The bullfrogs sang loudly in the pond, and the wind whispered over the hills.

"For my father, there was only poverty at home. They had the ships, and with them they found a few worlds. Some were unpopulated. Most of those were useless, for, if they had not developed life of their own, there was some ecological factor which kept them from supporting transplanted life. Some, it is true, were suitable."

Piper stopped, and Henry turned to see his head silhouetted against the starlight. He, too, was looking up.

"It makes you wonder," Henry said. "If each world is like a spore pod... You don't look any different from an Earthman..."

"Yes," Piper said, "it does make you wonder, doesn't it?"

HENRY FILLED his pipe deliberately. He found a match in his pocket and puffed the tobacco alight, and while he did there was silence on the porch except for the soft sucking sound.

How far do you go? If you have engines, you must make automobiles. If you can roll at twenty miles per hour, you can fly at thirty. If you can, in one generation, transform thirty mph into five hundred and thirty; and that into sixteen hundred before the second generation is fairly begun; and that into seven miles per second, then you have left the Earth behind. And if your ships can touch a sister world two-hundred-forty-thousand miles away, no matter how arid that satellite—if you can do that today, then tomorrow you can go where the worlds are green, and at that rate...

How long before the spreading ships, thrusting through Andromeda, meet the ones that started in the opposite direction?

And Henry wondered, as he sat on the porch. But what he wondered was this: What was the speed of belief, as distinct from the velocity and acceleration of information?

"Go on, Mr. Piper," he said. He did not know.

"Their ships found other worlds, as well. Worlds already populated, but not yet overburdened. This world we're on now is the planet to which my father came.

"There were not many of his people who came to Earth. Of those, each individual was free to choose whatever way of life appealed to him the most. Different things attract different people. There were some in every country, before the war. My father brought his wife with him; together, they found work, learned the language and customs, and saved enough money to buy this farm."

Again, Henry shrank from something within himself.

"That was all he and my mother wanted, Mr. Walters. They died content; the farm was their fortune. I had married a girl—one of our own people, that I found in western New York State—and my parents left us the farm."

The frogs were beginning to quiet down a little. Henry felt the pressure of the wind against his cheek as it changed direction slightly, and frowned as he automatically noted its fitful rise and wane. It might rain by morning.

Piper sighed. "We had our sons; we worked the land." He stopped, and his voice changed quality. "I fought in the Second World War, Mr. Walters. Two and a half years in the Army." He chuckled again. "I was a corporal in the infantry."

Henry grunted. "You'd have to fight, wouldn't you? Can't get away from the government—though I'll bet you volunteered."

"I did, as a matter of fact." There was a short, self-conscious laugh. "I learned better than to do that again."

"Amen," said Henry with an identical laugh. And now that they had both gone through the conventional, lying, disclaimer, Henry had learned a little more about the pace with which belief overtakes information. He twisted in his chair and leaned toward Piper, trying to see him more clearly in the darkness. Damn it all, here he sat on a porch with a man whose ancestors had sprung up under another sun—a man who'd been in a spaceship!

HENRY FOUND himself grappling with a swelling impatience to prod the man on with his story. But he had no right to do that, and knew it. If Piper were to stop now, he could never have the right to question him, but would have to be content with what he already knew; for what Piper had seen and done and had happen in his life was Piper's personal store of memory—it was all the man had left, except for his sons.

"And then," Piper said as if he had felt Henry's urgency, "this war began to stir into life. This time, we had to leave. We could have

stayed and fought as we'd fought before—fought each other, in a way; the same way you fought East Germans, Henry—but it wasn't the same kind of war anymore. This time, the civilians were really going to be hit. So the people from the mother planet came and evacuated us."

He sighed, the breath whispering between his teeth, and it took Henry a little while to realize that it meant he was biting his lower lip.

"I don't know," Piper said heavily. "I don't know if I would have stayed anyway, if I'd been alone. But Elizabeth wanted us to go; she had a lot of reasons, most of them good. I think she wanted it most because it meant the boys wouldn't have to go into one of the Services.

"I don't know whether that made us all cowards or not. We had responsibilities toward our country, and we ran out on them, that's sure. But every refugee from any war zone could be accused of the same thing. No civilian can really be expected to stay in a situation where he's going to be killed—particularly since he's not trained to fight back. Besides, how do you fight a cobalt bomb that goes off in the next state? Most civilians *had* to stick it—they didn't have any place to go; we did. Evacuate as many others as we could? Who's to pick and choose, and how much time did we have to convince anyone that we weren't going to eat them?

"Hell, we couldn't even step in and stop the war—not with any hope of not having this entire planet's population on our necks, howling for blood, as soon as they could develop starships of their own!

"The only thing I really regret is turning the boys into draft-dodgers against their will." His voice grew quietly proud. "They would have stayed, Henry. . . . You know, they were all on the football team at Waterbury High? Made All-State with that team.

"But, you know how it is. The folks were pulling out on them—and, besides, any kid that age would give his left eye and right arm to ride a starship, and see another world."

"Wouldn't have to be a kid," Henry said with quiet hunger.

"No, no, I suppose not," Piper said. "Anyway—" He stopped, searching for words. When he found them, the faintly lyrical quality had returned to his sentences.

TWO GENERATIONS weren't enough, Henry thought—particularly not since he'd been back to the world his father came from. Enough to sever all the ties, certainly, but not to blot out the traditions and the history he'd learned from his father when he was a boy. Only people steeped in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of overt unsentimentality

could speak of the lands of their fathers in light voices—and there was a reverence behind their flippancy when they did.

"We came back to my father's world. I can't tell you how many of us there were, in all, because I don't know. But it took three ships to take us.

"The world's name is Erelia—Erelia of the ice-blue seas. As with all planets, the word itself means simply, "the Earth," or "the world." It is the home—the one place in all the universe. And we, of course, were Erelians—"Earthmen."

He laughed, bitterly. The naked, unequivocal emotion of the sound raised the hackles of Henry's neck. Piper had never let down his guard so suddenly, or so completely.

"Poetry at midnight," Piper said in the voice of a man mocking himself. "Listen to this:

*One star beyond the brightest constellations burns,
Hung at the raveled edge of the galactic rim,
To which the farthest-traveled Earthman ever turns—
Which through the distance and the dimness calls to him."*

"Pretty good," Henry said. He sat and thought about it for a moment. "One of your people write it?"

"Doggerel," Piper said shortly. "I wrote it."

Once again, there was that bitter laugh that struck across the face of the night. "The point is *where* I wrote it—and I wrote it on Erelia." His voice dropped, and re-assumed its mantle of gentle sadness. "You see, I wrote it about myself, and Earth—*this* Earth.

"Do you know what Erelia is—Erelia of the ice-blue seas?" he demanded with sudden fierceness and the phrase which had been loving, was now a brassy and sarcastic thing on his tongue. "It's a dust-bowl—a teeming, destitute dust-bowl! The seas *are* blue with ice, and the people huddle miserably around animal-chip fires in tottering huts. Poverty! My father spoke of poverty—poverty he fled from—and *he* loved that world.

"We came down on it—on a gravel plain that stretched as far as any of us could see. They had set up temporary housing for us—temporary, thin-skinned wooden housing that lasted us for five Earth years; eight of the bitter Winters. There wasn't another acre of land on that entire planet where they had room for us. They fed us on charity; they gave us food as good as they themselves ate, and some of

us sickened and died on it. We lost five percent to pneumonia the first Winter.

"There's nothing left on that planet, Henry. The ships are based farther in—on the green worlds closer to the galactic center. The planet lives on sufferance—on whatever the colonized worlds can spare. There isn't a tool or a stick of wood or a scrap of cloth that hasn't got a fantastic value, and isn't carefully enumerated in the owner's last will and testament to be passed down to his heirs until it's worn to dust.

"They couldn't take us to one of the colonized worlds, because it would have been too far; it would have put too much of a drain on the economy when it was time to ship us back.

"And how they wanted to ship us back! They longed and ached and prayed for the day the war ended, and they could hurry us here—for we were breaking their backs. We—three shiploads to begin with, and dying like flies—were more than they could support. They took us in because they had to, and because they felt an obligation to us, I suppose. They gave us as good as they had—and it bled them white while we starved on it.

"The war ended, and they brought us back. They brought back what was left of us. Two shiploads—none too crowded. We turned pale, all of us, when we saw what had happened to the face of this planet. But they could not turn around to bring us back to Erelia. Again, it would have cost too much; and we would have killed Erelia for good and all. So, they left us. Those of us who can somehow shoehorn ourselves back into this society, will. Those who cannot will be picked up, if there are enough of them to be worth it, and will be taken somewhere else. To a colonized world if we're lucky—if they find one whose ecology can take us. If not, to another world such as this, to begin the assimilation process all over again."

HENRY HAD sat, listening as though weathering a storm. His face worked itself into a mask of the deepest pity he had ever known—and now he was terribly glad of the darkness.

"That bad, Harold?" he asked gently. "Is it? Was it? I know you lost your wife, and it's hard, but they were doing the best they could."

"I know." The resigned words fell quietly, muffled, as though Piper held his face in his hands. Then his voice cleared, but clung to its resignation. "Everyone does the best he can; the Erelians are doing theirs. It's only on Erelia itself that things are so bad, and that will be

over in another generation or two. They will spread out, and their people will begin to live again.

"But, meanwhile, there are...backwashes. Like my sons and myself."

He stood up suddenly, pushing his chair back. "Henry, I've trusted you with something that only one or two other native Earthmen know. My sons and I will leave in the morning, and you will never see us again. I don't suppose it matters, really, whether you try to pass on what I've told you to anyone else. Some of them won't believe you, and others will say they don't. Do what you think best." His voice became brooding. "I've seen Earth from space, Henry. It won't be long before the rockets go out, searching; they'll find Erelia soon enough."

He opened the porch door and stood half inside the house. "It's very late, Henry; all of us need sleep. Good night." The door closed behind him.

Henry let him go. Piper had talked himself out—had laid his emotions bare before a man he hadn't known for twelve hours.

And so Henry sat, for many more hours, thinking, while the stars wheeled by overhead and the misty wind edged over the mountains and obscured them.

IT WAS RAINING when Henry and the Pipers ate breakfast as silently as they had eaten supper, and the droplets rebounded from the roof of the car as Henry stood on the back porch and watched Piper start the motor. He had shaken hands with all four of them, and accepted their diffident thanks once more. He had started to speak a number of times, but stopped each time. Piper had not referred to what had been said on the porch; this morning his face was as Henry remembered it from yesterday, and not at all like the one that Henry had pictured beside him in the darkness.

But now the barrier broke in his throat, and just as Piper began to crank up his window, he shouted, "Wait!"

Something flickered over Piper's face—a sad smile, and, somehow, a knowing one. "Wait for me a minute," he told his sons, and came out of the car, dashing across the narrow strip of yard to the shelter of the porch.

"Harold—" Henry began.

"No, Henry," Piper said, cutting him off. The sad, wise smile touched his face again. "No, we can't stay; we don't belong any more. This is your land—your world. It may be my world, too, but the

claim's less certain. This Earth is your heritage, and I could not rob you. My heritage is wandering, in search of a home. Not a borrowed one, but one we can make our own. I owe it to my sons, Henry," he said quietly. "We'll try further north. There might be some land there. If not—" He shrugged and turned his eyes on the car, once more looking at his sons. "If not, then we will go to another world. And if not that one," he admitted, "then somewhere else. It would be unjust to take from another, and steal a birthright." He reached out and shook Henry's hand for the last time. "Goodbye, Henry."

"Goodbye, Harold... Good luck."

HE STOOD on the hillside, disregarding the rain, and saw the car bump down the narrow road, toward the highway that ran north. He did not know. He looked around at the land, soaking under the rain, and was not sure.

A backwash, Piper had called himself and his sons. And, perhaps he was right. Perhaps it was true that his race's real future was on the planets that were found new, and young, and undeveloped. In the light of historical logic, the Pipers were misplaced, a casual offshoot—doomed to wither—of the sudden outward burst of their people. Then, it was true that they had no right to add themselves as a burden to this planet; and it would have been unjust to take what he had been ready to offer, finally.

But with only a few worlds capable of being colonized... And all of Erelia's billions, surging to be free of their wan planet...

Justice was a blind goddess, holding a two-edged sword, and Henry wondered if she did not sometimes scar herself.

Only a few worlds. He thought of the Pipers, searching for land to buy when there was no land, except for what the government held in reserve for the men who had finally managed to save some of it. And while he stood, and watched the car go over the last rise in the road, the rain fell and fed the brook with muddy water.



Rebirth meant that one's life could be different...

THE NEXT TIME

by GARDA
JAMIESON



Attorney Robbins and looked around the luxuriously appointed windowless room. Pristine quiet soothed his nerves; filtered air refreshed his tired lungs, and filtered light comforted his world-weary eyes. Recessed in the back wall an automatic calendar-clock summed up what might turn out to be a significant moment in history. Three fourteen post meridiem, Monday, September 18, 1973.

Not until both men had gone through the solemn business of cutting and lighting their smokes did Ed lean back in his chair and look directly at his friend. "Well, Jim, what's on your mind?"

"It's my will, Ed. I'd like to make an entirely new will and testament." He ran a finger inside his collar. Science was wonderful pro-

JAMES HENRY SHELDON was not a praying man. Nevertheless, he antennae'd a reverent hope to whatever power it was which manipulated the universe that he wasn't making a mistake in coming to his old friend Ed Robbins to get a will and Rebirth papers fixed up for a second run through life.

James Henry settled himself into the armchair across the desk from

viding it was handled right. This medical science business of recreating one's self out of one's own regenerating cells and being "born" again was ticklish stuff. He'd heard of some second-timers who'd been careless about keeping their first records and found themselves starting the second time without a certain knowledge of who and what they'd been the first time. In which case, James Henry felt, they missed the point entirely, except as a shock-absorber when it came time to die. It did make it easier for a man to lie down and die when he knew he could be reborn at any particular time he chose, even when he knew he wouldn't remember his first life.

Ed looked properly thoughtful. "Thinking of getting married again?"

James Henry waved a weary hand. "Nothing like that." He tried a deprecatory smile but a smile wouldn't fit his features this bright afternoon. "No, I think I have a better idea of how to fix up my son more—appropriately."

"If you don't mind my saying so, I think you've already fixed that young devil up pretty damned handsome. How is Rick, anyway?"

"Back at Columbia again, at least. He's been in every kind of jam there is—I guess maybe he's levelling off. I hope."

"Did he marry that girl—what was her name?"

"Peggy? No, he—"

"Not Peggy. Uh—Linda. That one. What became of her?"

"Oh, that one. Haven't heard of her since. She was a nice girl. Wouldn't take a dime."

"How'd he come out in that drunk and reckless flying case up at Grove Point?"

"Same as usual. Cost me plenty; he's had two since then, in different places."

"It seems to me I read something about an assault and battery charge down in Midland. Anything to that?"

"There was. Had it dismissed. For a certain amount."

"Hmmm." Ed leaned back and thoughtfully blew a smoke ring at the ceiling. "You've certainly had your share of trouble with that boy, Jim. But it looks like you're set to breathe easy for a while. Why don't you go have some fun for yourself? You're getting gray as a goat. Color's bad, and you're too thin."

"A man with ulcers isn't supposed to have fun."

ED BLEW another smoke ring, then leaned earnestly toward his client. "What it all amounts to, Jim, is the blunt fact that this boy

of yours has practically ruined your life. Personally, I think there's a limit to what a man owes his offspring."

"Perhaps if Rick's mother had lived— It's a strange thing, but ever since he was a little shaver, Rick has taken particular delight in bedevilling me. It got worse as he grew older and discovered different ways to make a man lose his mind." James Henry ran a nervous hand across his forehead. "I tell you Ed, there've been times when I've wanted to drown him. I've thought of letting him be put away somewhere. But when I'd think of his mother, and her people still living around here, I couldn't bring myself to do it."

"Elizabeth was a fine woman. Nice family. Now—about this will. You really worried about your health, Jim?"

"A man can't live forever—in the same body, that is. I'll feel better after I have my will straightened out."

"What'd you have in mind? A new beneficiary?"

"No, no. I'll leave the plant and everything to Rick just the same. He knows more about building rockets right now than I did when I started. But I've decided to take another crack at life; be reborn. I'd like you to make up the papers and file the instructions."

Ed's small blue eyes brightened and his ruddy cheeks shook like jelly. "Bully for you! A great idea! I'd do it myself if I could afford it. And if I could get approved. You see—the laws covering Body Regeneration are construed to mean *regeneration for public good*. I've no great unfinished public works; no superbrain to pass on; no huge fortune to administer. Just a good, full life—I guess I'll have to be satisfied to stop there." Ed's smile was philosophically sad.

"Sometimes," said James Henry, "I think that to inherit the inclination toward just a good full life is about the best a man could get." For a few moments both men stared meditatively into space. James Henry was the first to come back to the business at hand.

"This approval, that's what I'm not too sure about. I've got the money, but I don't know whether the board would consider me worthy of a second chance. Although I've developed a standard low-priced rocket for the working man—which maybe you could say was a public service—I've certainly failed as a parent."

"It might work out. We'll get busy on it. You want rebirth scheduled to start at the time of your death, I suppose?"

"Approximately. Particularly, I want my records to show information regarding Rick—his childhood pranks; these jams he's been getting into; his general attitude toward me. And the girl trouble. Show

what I did each time to straighten him out. The steady decline of my health. It will make the story of my life, practically."

Ed looked uncertain. "You feel this is a good idea? You were worried about getting government approval—"

James Henry nodded. "It might even help. Have the records show Rick without present responsibilities, except the business in case he decides to go on with it if he ever finishes school—he may not want the plant; he says he's not cut out for industry and it certainly looks like it—but make a provision that in order to obtain his share of the money and stock he has to be married. That'll nail him down a little."

Ed made notes on his teletype. "Anything else?"

"I want it further stipulated that when I come along again, as an infant, Rick shall have full responsibility of my care. Education, home care, everything. From birth."

Ed began to chuckle softly. "And?"

"As for the education, I'd like it to follow along the same line as Rick's. I'd like to find out what was in Rick's education that made him capable of acting as he has."

"I see. Very interesting. And then?"

"That's about all except that he must maintain a home for his wife and me. Here in Buffalo, where I'm known."

"Suppose he refuses the money, so he won't have to accept the responsibilities that go with it?"

James Henry allowed himself a cautious snort. "He'll accept it all right, once he gets a taste of work supporting himself."

ED LEANED back. "Well, this looks as if it would get you approved all right. Your reason can be that you want to see that the boy settles down and continues with the business and research you've started. That you think it will make a man of him to have this particular kind of responsibility. That, and your money, ought to do it." He looked pointedly at James Henry. "What do you intend doing the next time? Make rockets again?"

"No-o-o, I've decided to take my vacation then. I'm going to demonstrate to Rick what it's like to be responsible for a boy who can think up trouble faster than someone can get him out of it." James Henry relaxed in his chair and stretched his thin legs in front of him. He felt a great soothing cloud beginning to envelope him. It wouldn't be long now until he could grin again with ease and satisfaction. "There's one important point I want to make. I've already made my

cell-deposit, to be kept in deepfreeze until it looks like I'm about ready to shuffle off. Then I want the cell incubated and started so that by the time I'm actually gone and the will is probated, the infant will be ready to take my place."

Ed chuckled again. "I think I follow you."

"Just about the time Rick's getting ready to celebrate my passing, he'll have a little visitor. You might add a personal note to Rick. Something like, *Hold everything, Richard. Here comes your little old man!* James Henry almost laughed. He got up and stretched. "Have this fixed up as soon as possible, will you Ed? I'd like to sign the papers a week from today."

"That's pushing things, but we'll try. As I say, your kind of money makes all the difference."

James Henry picked up his hat. "Thank you, Ed. You can't know how much this means to me." Ed nodded and the men shook hands. It was a solemn occasion, yet James Henry thought he detected a mischievous gleam in Ed's eye which just about matched the one he felt in his own.

James Henry waved his hat and left the office. If he'd been a whistling man he'd have whistled, in spite of the pain gripping his middle, as he walked down the hall toward the elevators. As he stepped out onto the landing strip atop the building and looked around for his pilot he fervently hoped that doctor of his knew what he was talking about yesterday when he'd said, "I'd say you have two, three months. Four at the outside."

It was going to be a lot different next time.



For those who believe that a story should instruct and uplift, as well as entertain, we offer this brief history of Virtue Triumphant.



IT SHOULD HAPPEN TO A DOG

by DENNIS WIEGAND

illustrated by FREAS

NATURALLY, there are so many planets in the galaxy that anything can happen. But what happened to a planet named Virtue Triumphant shouldn't have happened to a Dog.

As a matter of fact, it *was* planned to happen to a planet named Dog, planned by the industrious, righteous people of the planet Virtue Triumphant.

The names themselves reveal quite a good deal about the kind of people who inhabited those planets. And the story of what happened to Virtue Triumphant has never been told before, because no one would imagine that a boy from Virtue Triumphant could fall in love with a Dog girl.



Of course, without a love story to keep things hopping along there's not much point in even attempting to tell what happened to Virtue Triumphant. The story, therefore, has suffered what has hitherto seemed a deserved neglect by the many writers who, no doubt, would otherwise have told it.

However, more recent researches among the archives of Virtue Triumphant have revealed a number of veiled—and, apparently heavily censored—references to a renegade young peanut planter from Virtue Triumphant who did actually fall in love with a beautiful young girl from Dog.

The carelessly-kept and desultory state records of the planet Dog seem to indicate that this same young peanut farmer rose to the position of Minister for Foreign Affairs of the planet Dog. He was, in fact, the first Minister for Foreign Affairs this backward planet ever had.

Even with a love-interest clearly established, it is no easy matter to impose any regular form upon this narrative. On the one hand, we have the verbose, heavily-veiled, bowdlerized and oblique histories of Virtue Triumphant; on the other, the sheer neglect and desuetude of the chroniclers of Dog.

It would appear, however, that in a galaxy monotonously and unimaginatively labelled from end to end with the names of ancient Greek and Roman mythology, the planets "Dog" and "Virtue Triumphant" stood out only in their deviation from the accepted pattern of names for planets. Otherwise, they swam about in their distant, obscure orbits outside the main force-currents of galactipolitics, virtually unremarked.

The name, apparently, derives from the corruption of that planet's name as it first registered on Terran ears when spoken in the harsh native tongue of the planet. English, of course, has been the language of Dog for many generations. The native tongue of the Canines—who are a humanoid species—was so deficient that it was abandoned altogether.

The people of Virtue Triumphant, on the other hand, brought the English tongue with them on the historic spaceship "Mayflower" when they planted their sombre black-and-blue flag on the planet. They were a stern and rigid folk who broke from the corrupt comforts of Terra and set rocket for the trackless wastes of outer space, to form a community more in accord with their own unbending principles.

The intrepidity and zeal of the founders of Virtue Triumphant had

its ample reward in the rapid development of such great cities as Purity, Faith, Truth, Patience, Peace and Honor, the thriving capital city itself.

These great cities, and many smaller ones, together with the unswervingly industrious countryside of Virtue Triumphant made it a powerful manufacturing and trading nation, despite its awkward and inconvenient distance from the galactic center.

The people of Virtue Triumphant, however, considered their distance from the galactic center a blessing; it completely discouraged visitors and tourists, who would inevitably bring with them a corrupting influence. No anti-alien law was necessary.

It also meant, of course, that all freight traffic between Virtue Triumphant and the galactic center had to be carried by the merchant fleet of Virtue Triumphant. This was not considered disadvantageous, especially in view of the prevailing rates, which were designed to balance the extremely reasonable rebates offered shippers from Virtue Triumphant to ports at the galactic center.

Virtue Triumphant, thus, became a symbol of its own name. The industry and sobriety of its people made it prosperous, dull, orderly, grim, strong, cheerless and efficient. Indeed, the solemn, hard-working people didn't themselves realize their own great strength, did not realize that the fleet they finally raised to scourge the sinful menace of the planet Dog from outer space was more than enough to make them masters of an entire Galactic Empire.

The patient, self-contained spacemen of the merchant fleet of Virtue Triumphant were legendary figures in all the great ports of the galaxy. Legendary, in the sense that no one ever saw them in the streets, or in the spacemen's cabarets which ringed the spaceports.

The same unyielding character which made the spacemen of Virtue Triumphant the only ones with the spiritual hardihood to endure the vastly long and dreary voyages from their homeports to the center ports, kept them always aboard their vessels, their hands unceasingly busy with the work of loading and unloading.

THAT THE people of Virtue Triumphant ever became sufficiently aware of the planet Dog to realize the urgent menace it presented was entirely due to the position occupied by Dog. The great stretches of outer space between Virtue Triumphant and the markets of the galactic center were astrogatable only during certain, regularly-recurring periods.

During these infrequent favorable periods, the planet Dog drifted fecklessly in its orbit at a point closely passed by the merchant ships of Virtue Triumphant. One might say, speaking comparatively, that Dog was just outside the untidy suburban fringes of the galactic center, without being in any way a part of the galactic culture or civilization. While, by the same comparison, Virtue Triumphant was far, far out in the countryside at the fresh-scented edge of virgin timber.

Dog was, nevertheless, the closest neighbor to Virtue Triumphant and thus subject to some degree of morbid curiosity. Naturally, the people of Virtue Triumphant had little exact knowledge of its geography and culture.

"You must learn to be careful and obedient," young mothers of Virtue Triumphant were wont to caution their young, "or you'll grow up to be a careless, mistake-making spaceman and be shipwrecked on Dog."

This was about the calibre of the knowledge and information about Dog that was current on Virtue Triumphant at the time the noted Triumphant journalist, Born Again Bookman, made an actual visit to Dog. His subsequent volume, "Inside Dog", made it quite clear to the shocked and aroused populace of Virtue Triumphant that the planet Dog was something more than a mere menace to astrogation.

The book was quite popular, in a pirated edition, in the cabarets and gambling dives of Bark, the capital and only city of Dog; reviewers had a field day.

"...hilariously dead-pan account...pilgrim's progress in our unfair city..." stated one review.

"...VT newsman Born Again Bookman's experiences 'Inside Dog' were brief, poorly digested...with the expected result..." wrote another reviewer.

Had the people of Dog, however, known the violent sensation the book was stirring up in the highest circles on Virtue Triumphant, they might not have laughed so heartily. But, as a matter of strict fact, the citizens of Dog did not read Born Again Bookman's vaporings. The two newspapers, the countless dens, dives, joints, ballrooms and night clubs of Dog didn't belong to the Canine citizens themselves.

In fact, the great, sprawling capital city of Bark was actually a teeming foreign settlement.

HERE WE have, again, a situation that requires a little explanation before the love interest can be properly threaded into the story.

The brawling, blatant metropolis that was Bark had mushroomed from the site fertilized by the decay of the ancient Canine city of Buyt. Born in a frivolous punning mood (Bark is worse than Buyt), the city of Bark sprang to lusty girthhood by pandering to every known vice in the entire galaxy. As the touted sin-center of the galaxy, it encouraged—with generous grants of municipal funds—flagrant experimentation to discover and develop vices yet unknown.

Buyt, even in its Golden Age, was never much of a city. The people of Dog were overwhelmingly an agricultural race, and they never developed the manufactures or the need for market-centers that creates towns and great cities, and the cultural complexes that arise from them. Originally founded on the rabbit-trap manufacturing industry, Buyt rapidly languished when a simpler and more satisfactory solution to the rabbit problem was developed.

There exists no exact record, of course, of just when it was that pioneering libertines discovered, with a howl of obscene triumph that Buyt—reduced by then to a mere municipal nubbin—had no laws whatever. Not even an anti-expectoration ordinance. Not so much as a whiff or hair of let or hindrance was there in Buyt.

Nor were there any taxes of any kind.

From a humble beginning as a Bohemian artists' colony, the city of Bark phoenixed fantastically from the ashes of Buyt's rabbit-snare factories as it attracted the moral rejects of a hundred worlds. Soon the artists were forced to leave by the sharp rise in prices, and Bark became an intergalactic playground for the wealth and leisure of a polyglot civilization.

Tens of thousands of spaceyachts and smaller pleasure craft ceaselessly hovered and zoomed over the pulsating, lewdly writhing jungle of colored neo-neon lights that was luxurious, unrestrained Bark... Sin City Supreme. It is easily understood how this incredible frenzy of activity was misinterpreted by Born Again Bookman. To the mind of a citizen of Virtue Triumphant, such furious goings and coming could mean nothing except production on an unimaginably mighty scale. Production of endless streams of great machines for use and for war.

Not one of the citizens of Virtue Triumphant could ever have looked upon the frenetic spectacle of Bark and have stretched his imagination to encompass the realization that it was all in fun. That nothing whatever came of all Bark's gigantic labors except folly and frolic. Elasticity of imagination was not encouraged by the way of life on Virtue Triumphant. For that matter, neither was imagination.

Born Again Bookman, of course, reported exactly what he saw of life on Dog, every word of which reinforced the vague, horrific legends that had filtered down through the preserved tradition of a much earlier, and otherwise unrecorded, contact with and recoil from the ways of Dog. And what Bookman saw of Bark—for he didn't venture outside the capital itself—was only a minute fraction of the resources the city had to offer. In short, he saw the area between the spaceport where he landed (not in a Virtue Triumphant transport, of course) and the bor-tel at which he registered (on his own insistence a form for this purpose was finally found and produced) for his three-day visit.

The excellently trained and competent guides whom he retained showed him exactly what he asked and paid to see, as they were prepared to do for any client, however bizarre the request.

It was upon this information, therefore, that the Council of Elders of Virtue Triumphant decided to throw the fantastic power of concentrated and undeviating industriousness of their citizens into staging the gigantic armada for the Crusade to obliterate the obscene menace that was the planet Dog.

HOWEVER, before introducing our lovers upon this confused scene it might be as well to clear up a few of the misconceptions about Dog resulting from the publication of Born Again Bookman's "Inside Dog".

For one thing, while it was true that the hordes of spaceships of all sizes and types that darkened the skies over the city of Bark far outnumbered any fleet the mightiest and most militant of the known planets could have mustered, not a single one of them bore Dog tags. There was, indeed, no system of registering spacecraft on Dog, since no citizen of Dog owned a spacecraft of any kind.

So, of course, the graphic word-pictures and the actual photographs of the battle fleet of Dog that appeared in Bookman's influential volume were needlessly alarming.

On the other hand, it could not be denied that the throngs of men in uniform who jostled and streamed through the streets of Bark were actually native citizens of Dog.

The distinguished journalist's only serious error in reporting this threatening indication of rampant militarism was understandable, under the circumstances. These uniformed Canines were not soldiers and

shock-troopers of a bewildering multitude of types and units (as indicated by the great variety of uniforms).

They were simply policemen. Bark had tens of thousands of policemen.

Of course, there were no laws of any kind on Dog—since no one had taken the trouble to make any—and there was no need for policemen, actually. However, the outlanders who operated and patronized the dens, dives, dance-halls and night clubs of Bark urgently felt the need of having policemen around. Without policemen to bribe and pay off, much of the tang and zest of gambling and other sinful goings-on was lost.

It is readily understandable that without a policeman's nose to do certain things right under, doing those certain things isn't much fun.

So the wastrels and n'er-do-wells flocked into Bark from the hinterlands of Dog, donned uniforms of their own choice, design or happenstance, and stood about accepting small bribes, and looking on in as forbidding a manner as they could muster. The more talented actors among them quickly won the right to wear a sergeant's chevrons.

A policeman, in fact, was so much lower in status than a Dog citizen in good standing that only the most "ornery" Canines were driven off the peanut fields and into town to play this unhonored, but vitally titillating, role in the fabulously wicked city of Bark.

It should be made clear, however, that this general attitude of contempt for policemen implied no wild and outlaw spirit among the citizens of Dog.

Since Dog's simple, but quite satisfactory, economy was based upon the peanut...and peanuts were almost embarrassingly plentiful...there were none of the social pressures and frictions which arise in more complex economic systems.

A policeman was useless, therefore, and scorned by the people of Dog; who were, it must be admitted, in their turn, scorned and looked down upon by the inhabitants of the other planets as shiftless and no-account. Those few outlanders, for example, who had even ventured outside the limits of the city of Bark never failed to be amused, rather patronizingly amused, by the Dog method of fencing the peanut fields.

Strictly speaking, there were no fences; there wasn't much point in fences in a land where no one would trouble to steal even an already-shucked peanut. But along the edges of the peanut fields, at conveniently random intervals, were set brief stretches of rail fence. More frequently, these odd bits of fence were located within the field itself.

"Them's jest fer a-settin' an' a-thinkin'," the peanut farmers would explain, scratching their heads in a puzzled way when the touring outlanders would go off in gales of laughter—or whatever other vehicle was employed on their native planet for being carried away by mirth.

THE DISCOVERY of Symbiosis had, of course, long ago eliminated the rabbit problem—although not the rabbits—and, naturally, brought about the decline of the old city of Buyt by undermining the rabbit-trap industry. It seems essential to clear up this point, since our lovers would never have met had it not been for the fact that the daring young peanut planter from Virtue Triumphant, in desperation, had come to Dog for the purpose of studying the Symbiotic System of rabbit-control developed by the peanut farmers of Dog.

The peanuts of Dog can only be described as startling. Just one of them, suddenly appearing in a shipment of laboratory specimens, would have discouraged the pioneer and almost-forgotten Terran student of the peanut, George Washington Carver. This would have deprived Bark of its only public monument (the others are enclosed and may be viewed by adults only, on payment of a fee) which still stands in the middle of Carver Square, marking the center of the old city of Buyt.

The soil of Dog lends itself with extraordinary enthusiasm to the growing of leguminous plants. For some obscure chemical reason, which no one seems to have felt justified in questioning, the soil of Dog cannot be persuaded by even the harshest of measures to grow non-leguminous plants. Naturally, for countless generations the planet Dog was an almost impenetrable tangle of pea-vines. That is, on the higher and less fertile mountain slopes which were much too steep for a very obese rabbit to climb.

Then Symbiosis was invented—or, rather, imported from the planets of the galactic center where it was all the rage. By this time, the struggling citizens of Dog were more than willing to live and let live. It seemed, then, wiser to try to live with the rabbits than to fight them. But how?

The peanut proved to be the complete answer.

Since rabbit fat is rank and disgusting stuff, Symbiosis could not be applied on Dog in any literal sense. But rabbits could be, and were, successfully exported to the more distant planets; the rabbits could be reduced to prime table condition during the course of a six or eight months journey.

However, penning and leaning-down of rabbits on Dog itself proved

to be a wearisome, worrisome lot of work; so it never did amount to much. The rabbit export trade seemed barely worth the bother of picking up the heavy rabbits and dropping them into crates, since the credits thus earned didn't serve to purchase all the raw materials annually imported and consumed by the rabbit-trap industry.

One can, then, easily imagine the rejoicing with which it was discovered that the peanut would not only lend itself handsomely and almost eagerly to distillation; but that it also solved the secondary problem presented by the rabbits.

The rabbits of the planet Dog ate the newly-imported peanut vines right down to the ground, thus incidentally giving an enormous impetus to communications and transportation on Dog. These arts had hitherto been grossly hampered by the thick tangles of podless pea-vines; the rabbits had scorned the coarser parts of the pea plants, their hunger being blunted by the great, succulent pods themselves.

Relieved of a great overhead of peanut vines to nourish and sustain, almost the full impact of the legume-loving soil of Dog was lavished upon the peanut pods themselves. Naturally, the rabbits of Dog even now were too fat and lazy to take the trouble of digging up the gigantic peanuts. The humanoid of Dog, however, didn't mind this labor—especially since there existed a heavy surplus of females on Dog. So the women of Dog exhumed the peanuts, while the men spent their days over hot stoves, cooking the mash.

The long, silky fibers of the enormous peanut shells could be spun and woven into soft and durable cloth. Peanut oil provided a tough lubricant as well as a hot, clear flame. Peanut flour made acceptable pastries. Fermented peanuts produced a liquor that was unmatched for aroma, body, and ferocity.

It was this latter by-product which was the stable basis of Dog's foreign trade. While the thought of taxing or licensing the dives and dens of Bark would have been repugnant to the liberty-loving Canines, it would have seemed selfish and inhumanoid to deny the delights of peanut liquor to their foreign guests.

Besides, there was such an abundance of the peanut liquor that had the producers attempted to consume their entire product, the economy of the liquor industry would have broken down. It had been tried generations ago, and the result had been that the producers had been entirely unfitted to carry out their important duties for over a year. There was such widespread suffering in the land during the essential minimum aging period of six months, when the production was finally

resumed, that the distillers of Dog never again forgot their manners.

The surplus, therefore, was sold in bulk to the Syndicate of Police Captains and Lieutenants of the City of Bark. The Syndicate bottled the peanut liquor in specially-designed peanut-shell-shaped bottles which, because of their deceptive shape, held considerably less than it appeared they did. These bottles were then retailed—with a ceremonious show of surreptitiousness—by the policemen of Dog.

The advantages of having one's foreign market captive, so to speak, are obvious. The planet Dog, through this convenient arrangement, found it quite unnecessary to maintain the expense of a merchant fleet, or of an armed patrol to protect its tempting cargo.

What few items the people of Dog needed from foreign planets were smuggled to them on the spaceyachts of the most prominent and influential citizens of those planets. And the very nature of the medium itself insured a much more generous and hail-fellow rate of exchange than had the citizens of Dog used a more conventional medium of trade.

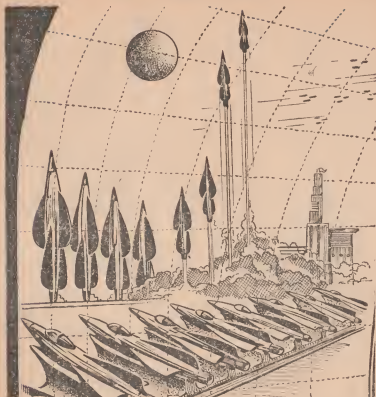
IT IS IN this very matter of the choice of a system of money that the reader is cautioned, should he ever wish to create a new nation.

The peanut, for example, as a unit of monetary exchange has a versatility that recommends it to serious attention. Its stability is unrivaled. Should the oil industry, for instance, be floundering in a surplus, it can readily be converted entirely or in part to the distilling industry, using the same capital, raw materials and, in this instance, much of the same equipment.

Should the textile industry be faced with glutted warehouses, it can simply and painlessly shut down for whatever time is necessary to exhaust the surplus, since there is no real money (that is, peanut-meats) employed in its processes. There's not the remotest chance of a shortage of peanut shells for resumed operations.

The food industry, of course, could be affected only by an epidemic of lockjaw. The housing industry can present no problems in a system which decrees that a man must shell peanuts in order to eat. Compressed peanut-shell blocks and boards, convenient and plentiful though they may be, are not an essential manufacture.

Any family on Dog can eat itself into house and home in less than six months, if the housing industry should be the victim of a depression. A simple double wall of woven wattle and withe, filled with pea-



nut shells, provides an insulation quality far better than that demanded by the gentle climate of Dog.

The conforming folk of Virtue Triumphant, on the other hand, are dedicated to the galactic monetary standard, based on man-hours. These credits, as they are called, are a very dangerous and unmanageable form of currency. Particularly among zealous folk like those of Virtue Triumphant is a baneful inflationary tendency chronic.

Unlike the peanuts of Dog, the credits of the various planets are not

uniform in measure; the man-hours of some planets are of very little value. Had Dog elected to go along with the tide of galactic convention in matters monetary, it would have been in a sorry state indeed; there would have been no foreign trade whatever, since this activity would have constituted an extreme luxury to these simple, leisure-loving people.

Of course, the credits of Virtue Triumphant enjoy the highest exchange-rate in the galaxy, despite the tendency toward over-production of credits in the domestic economy. But a generous, uniform credit is no guarantee against the dangers inherent in this form of monetary system.

This, perhaps, can be no more clearly demonstrated than in the complex and disastrous financing of the Great Crusade against Dog.

However, before we glance briefly at this aspect of the background of our story it is, perhaps, at this juncture that we should consider the unfortunate and obtuse attitude traditionally taken by the good citizens of Virtue Triumphant toward the peanut.

A study of this attitude, too, will make it quite clear why the intrepid young peanut planter of Virtue Triumphant was allowed to leave his native planet to pursue his studies of the Symbiotic System of rabbit-control on Dog.

Naturally, no citizen of Virtue Triumphant would ordinarily have been granted a passport to visit Dog. The case of the distinguished journalist Born Again Bookman, of course, was exceptional; and even then the necessary clearances were obtained only with the greatest difficulty and unremitting prayer.

Indeed, the only obstacle to the successful conclusion of the Great Crusade was foreseen by the High Command of Virtue Triumphant in the absolute ban—so successfully imposed by the organized Mothers of Virtue Triumphant—upon the landing of a single young VT space-soldier on the contaminating surface of Dog.

But a peanut planter was quite another thing. Peanuts have been loathed and despised on Virtue Triumphant for generations. Woe be unto the man who appears on the public ways of Virtue Triumphant with the reek of peanuts on his breath!

While not forthrightly forbidden by law, the production and sale of peanuts on Virtue Triumphant was subject to onerous taxation. These penalizing imposts, combined with the depredations of rabbits, made it almost impossible for the young man, whose charming love story animates our present account, to survive.

Of course, it will be understood that the rabbits of Virtue Triumphant were like those of Dog in superficial appearance only. They were unremitting in the digging up of peanuts. Indeed, they seemed to feel it was their duty to exhume peanuts, since they habitually dug more than they cared to eat themselves. This surplus, harvested without labor cost as it was, was the narrow margin on which the peanut planter of Virtue Triumphant found his despised livelihood.

THE SNUG, saucer-like valley which our young gallant had inherited from his forebearers lent itself peculiarly to the production of peanuts . . . and of nothing else. It was, in fact, the opinion (never published) of at least one VT scientist that the farmstead was nothing more than the impact-crater of a sizeable clod of Dog which had in pre-historic times become detached and took to space as a rather sluggish meteor, arriving with no evidences of fusing or frictional heat.

At all events, considered a pariah among his own people, the future foreign minister of Dog was granted his passport readily enough.

It will be evident that, considering the wide variance between the habits and character of the rabbits of Virtue Triumphant and of Dog, the study of rabbit-control methods on Dog was actually a bootless quest.

Nevertheless, it was thus that the VT stalwart came to spend much time in the company of the charming young daughter of old "Goober" Norr, who might have been chief executive of Dog, had anyone thought to have elections. Still, this wise old humanoid was effectively in gubernatorial control of Dog and it was, naturally, to his vast peanut farm that the young foreign student gravitated.

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And it was Goober Norr who appointed him Foreign Minister when the great battle-fleet of Virtue Triumphant hung, at last, in a menacing cloud over Dog.

As a matter of fact, the scourging armada of Virtue Triumphant hovered for the better part of a week over Dog before radio communication was established. The only operating radio transmitter on Dog, at the time, was that employed by the bor-tel association for receiving and verifying room reservations. This embarrassing and anticlimactic delay in their righteous assault upon Dog resulted from the time expended by wireless operators from the command ship of the VT flotilla in their frantic probing of the radio-bands for this station's frequency.

When, finally, the defiant ultimatum was received, there was some further delay in determining to whom it should be presented.

Since it was the off-season for the hellish resorts of Dog—this being the period of its closest approach to Virtue Triumphant, which emanated depressing gravitational forces at this season—there were no pleasure craft aloft, nor was the spaceport transmitter in normal operation.

It will be seen by this that the virtuous resolve of the citizens of Virtue Triumphant was such as to lead them to abandon their periodic mercantile pilgrimage to the galactic center.

Since, due to the unique astrogational conditions which prevailed along the route they must follow, this period occurred only once in five Terran years, it is evident that the economic sacrifice was considerable.

IT WAS OUR young hero—whose name, incidentally, was Bradford Standish—who brought the dread tidings of impending doom to Goober Norr while the latter was sitting on a length of fence in the middle of one of his spreading peanut fields.

"...and they have bombs of vast and surpassing strength," concluded the young man breathlessly. "They challenge your most devilish defiance, and court your most fiendish resistance..."

"...Humm..." mused Goober Norr. "You say you picked up this tattered and torn spacegram in a gutter of Bark? Well, could be it means nothing. 'Course all them spaceships a-hangin' off-shore sorta bears it out. I jest figgered, up to now, they was some outfit like the galactic Rotarians, or such-like, havin' the business session of a convention afore puttin' in fer the fun part."

"No, no," protested Bradford Standish, "I know well the markings of the spacefleet of Virtue Triumphant. It is indeed they; they would parley with your Minister of Foreign Affairs."

"Well, now," replied Goober Norr, stretching and yawning, "I guess you be elected, seein' as how you be the only furriner in these parts. Ought to know somethin' about furrin affairs."

"But, but," sputtered Bradford Standish, "how shall I reply to them? We have no means of defiance."

"Why, shucks, son," said Goober Norr, "I 'spect you better tell 'em we surrender, right off. I 'spose they'd respect private proppity rights? Hunh?"

"Oh, most certainly," said Bradford Standish, his tone of shocked reproach giving the question its measure. "Private property is the most fundamental and respected right guaranteed by our Governing Covenant."

"Well, son, I guess we'll jest give in," said Goober Norr. "Dog ain't nothin' but private proppity from stem to stern, exceptin' the public urinal in the corner of Carver Square. I hearby authorizes you to turn over all public buildin's to the fleet commander of Virtue Triumphant."

Uncomfortable, cramped and inconvenient as his occupation headquarters on Dog were, the Commanding Chaplain of the VT fleet set zealously to work promulgating decrees and establishing the military government of Dog. Since he and only a handful of other very senior spacemen were permitted to land on Dog—by reason of the ban obtained by the Mothers of Virtue Triumphant—his labors were, perforce, Herculean.

Fortunately, he felt, his lack of manpower was greatly mitigated by the availability of the huge police force of Bark for duty as his enforcement arm. Each was, therefore, equipped with a rulebook, and a little wheeled cart in which to carry it, and set to patrolling the deserted, off-season streets of Bark.

Bitterly disappointed by the supine attitude of the defenders of Dog, the Council of Elders of Virtue Triumphant were no less zealously occupied than the Commanding Chaplain of their great armada in the field. Indeed, everyone on Virtue Triumphant labored furiously to sustain the easy victory.

Which fact, of course, was inevitably disastrous to an economy rigidly founded on a man-hour-based currency. The great labor of building spacewarships, and converting the leased merchant ships to bombers

and quartermaster functions, had left every family of Virtue Triumphant with bales of bonds representing thousands of man-hours expended.

Certificates representing man-hours were pouring from government-subsidized presses in great streams which were, nevertheless, barely sufficient to represent the man-hours expended in the printing industry itself.

In the meanwhile, of course, nearly ten percent of the arable land of Virtue Triumphant had been permanently vitrified by the heat generated by the take-off and landing-brake rockets of the fleet maneuvering and testing in preparation for the Great Crusade.

This, since Virtue Triumphant was overwhelmingly a manufacturing nation, was more serious than it seemed. Indeed, rabbit-control measures began appearing before the Council of Elders, decently disguised though they were as legislation designed to encourage exploitation of neglected meat supplies.

But there could be no blinking the fact that even women, including some Mothers, were appearing in public with the ill-concealed odor of peanuts on their breath. Such as these were placed under close surveillance in an effort to trace the source of the peanuts, as it became apparent that the meager supply of peanuts would have to be impounded as an extreme war-economy measure—to ensure the strength of the vital Council of Elders.

THERE IS little point in following out closely the rapid series of determined and desperate steps whereby all outstanding credit certificates were blocked as currency and replaced in the market places by new certificates representing agricultural man-hours only.

The credits of Virtue Triumphant were, thus, at a single stroke, subjected to astronomical inflation. Twenty solid years' worth of industrial old-style certificates exchanged hands on the thriving black market for as few as a dozen of the new certificates, representing as many agricultural hours. Or the approximate equivalent of a half-peck of peanuts.

In desperation, the Council of Elders ordered the Commanding Chaplain of the occupation of Dog to initiate a great foreign trade with the planet Dog, the only foreign planet available at this season.

Since the planet Dog had only one product, this order was tantamount to liberating the peanut from the contempt in which it had so long been held. Indeed, the discriminatory peanut taxes were repealed in toto.

However, the same Governing Covenant which scrupulously respect-

ed the private property rights of the people of Dog, and made it completely unthinkable for the Commanding Chaplain to confiscate so much as a single sorely-needed peanut, also made it impossible to adjust the differential freight-rates of the VT transport monopoly.

These rates, so disadvantageous to those making shipments of goods to Virtue Triumphant in VT hulls, made it economically feasible to the people of Dog to ship peanuts to Virtue Triumphant in only the most concentrated form.

And, as we have seen, that could mean only peanut liquor.

Fortunately for the starving populace of Virtue Triumphant, their tremendous invasion fleet, darkening the skies over Dog, had a certain nuisance value. The state-owned combat units of the fleet were, of course, useless as emergency peanut transports since such use would have contravened the private property rights of the enfranchised transport monopoly.

Since, too, the plastic-pew factories, and the hymnal binderies, and other heavy industries of Virtue Triumphant produced nothing of necessity or use to the simple farmers of Dog, there was little to induce them into trade with Virtue Triumphant.

However, the great fleet which had forced the government of Dog so ignominiously to its knees was so numerous as to interfere seriously

SCIENCE-FICTION

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with the passage of sunlight from outer space to the peanut fields of Dog. Thus the people of Dog felt it well worth their while to purchase the state-owned warships, one by one, with peanut liquor.

Since, in effect, the currency unit of Virtue Triumphant was now the potently nourishing peanut, the number of peanuts required to produce one quart of peanut liquor was computed and the product valued accordingly. Because the deceptive, characteristic peanut-shell-shaped bottles were still in use, this system of valuing served to offset to a considerable degree the fantastically high freight rates exacted by the VT transport monopoly.

Th purchased warships were grounded (after their personnel had been transferred to transports which returned them to Virtue Triumphant at a cost which more than equaled the value, in peanuts, of the decommissioned warship) and many of them were used as vats for peanut mash, such vats being in short supply because of the rapidly expanding peanut liquor industry.

WHILE THE transport monopoly of Virtue Triumphant was assigned the cargoes of peanut liquor it carried, as partial payment on the government warrants it acquired for returning the victorious troops from the bartered warships, the principal stockholder of the transport monopoly was Bradford Standish, in joint tenancy with his bride, the former Priscilla Norr.

The daughter of Goober Norr, modest and lovely though she was, had won the true and loyal heart of Bradford Standish by her suggestion that they return to his peanut plantation on Virtue Triumphant and produce actual, whole peanuts for the luxury trade.

Her solution of the rabbit problem, so puzzlingly different from that of Dog, was the final endearing stroke. She suggested that the rabbits remaining on Virtue Triumphant be muzzled and turned loose on the peanut fields, thus permitting the zealous bunnies to harvest the fantastically valuable crop without labor cost or loss.

This was not the outre idea it might seem to be.

In fact, it was intensely practical, as Bradford Standish immediately recognized. Substantial subsidies for private enterprises had long been the principle drain on the tax revenues of Virtue Triumphant, gaining a larger percentage of such revenues than any other public work specifically enjoined and authorized by the Governing Covenant.

There was no trouble whatever in the matter of gaining the subsidy for the purpose of muzzling all the surviving rabbits of Virtue Tri-

umphant, as well as the necessary legislation for their future protection. Peanut planting was now a recognized, even hallowed, industry. . . despite the poverty of most of the land of Virtue Triumphant in this respect.

Capturing and muzzling rabbits, after hilarious and weaving pursuit, was just exactly the sort of work best suited to the people of Virtue Triumphant. Such labor as digging up peanuts would, it is to be feared, have had little appeal to a populace, of necessity, steeped in imported peanut liquor.

At the conclusion of the five years which the planets between Virtue Triumphant and the galactic center required to adjust their relative positions on their orbits to eliminate the non-astrogatable gravitational currents they set up at other times, the transport monopoly of Virtue Triumphant was, in effect, the government.

The addition of a fleet of converted VT war vessels—a wedding present from the father of the bride of the Managing Director of the transport monopoly—made the first mercantile pilgrimage in a decade the greatest in the history of Virtue Triumphant.

As the mighty armada of peace and commerce passed majestically over the humble, feckless planet Dog, Bradford and Priscilla Standish stood arm in arm before the televue window in the luxurious managing director's suite in the great flagship of the fleet and watched the tiny planet loom into view.

"There it is!" exclaimed Priscilla. "My own . . . my native land!"

"In joint tenancy with me, my dear," Bradford Standish gently reminded her. "A colony of Virtue Triumphant, which we own together."

"Yes, of course," agreed Priscilla dutifully. "And just to think, darling . . . we bought it for peanuts!"

During the brief moment that unrolled the great and gay city of Bark before the televue window of the low-flying flagship for only the minutest possible fraction of time it was possible to see, in the remote lower left-hand corner of the screen, the proud waving of that sombre-colored banner that symbolized the might and right of the great Commonwealth of Virtue Triumphant unfurled from the topmost pinnacle of the former public urinal in Carver Square, once the heart of the ancient city of Buyt.



How I foxed the Navy

by Arthur Godfrey



The Navy almost scuttled me. I shudder to think of it. My crazy career could have ended right there.

To be scuttled by the Navy you've either got to do something wrong or neglect to do something right. They've got you both ways. For my part, I neglected to finish high school.

Ordinarily, a man can get along without a high school diploma. Plenty of men have. But not in the Navy. At least not in the U. S. Navy Materiel School at Bellevue, D. C., back in 1929. In those days a bluejacket had to have a mind like Einstein's. And I didn't.

"Godfrey," said the lieutenant a few days after I'd checked in, "either you learn mathematics and learn it fast or out you go. I'll give you six weeks." This, I figured, was it. For a guy who had to take off his shoes to count

above ten, it was an impossible assignment.

I was ready to turn in my bell-bottoms. But an ad in a magazine stopped me. Here, it said, is your chance to get special training in almost any subject—mathematics included. I hopped on it. Within a week I was enrolled with the International Correspondence Schools studying algebra, geometry and trig for all I was worth.

Came week-end liberty, I studied. Came a holiday, I studied. Came the end of the six weeks, I was top man in the class. Within six weeks I had mastered two years of high school math, thanks to the training I'd gotten.

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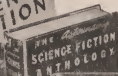
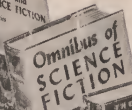
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